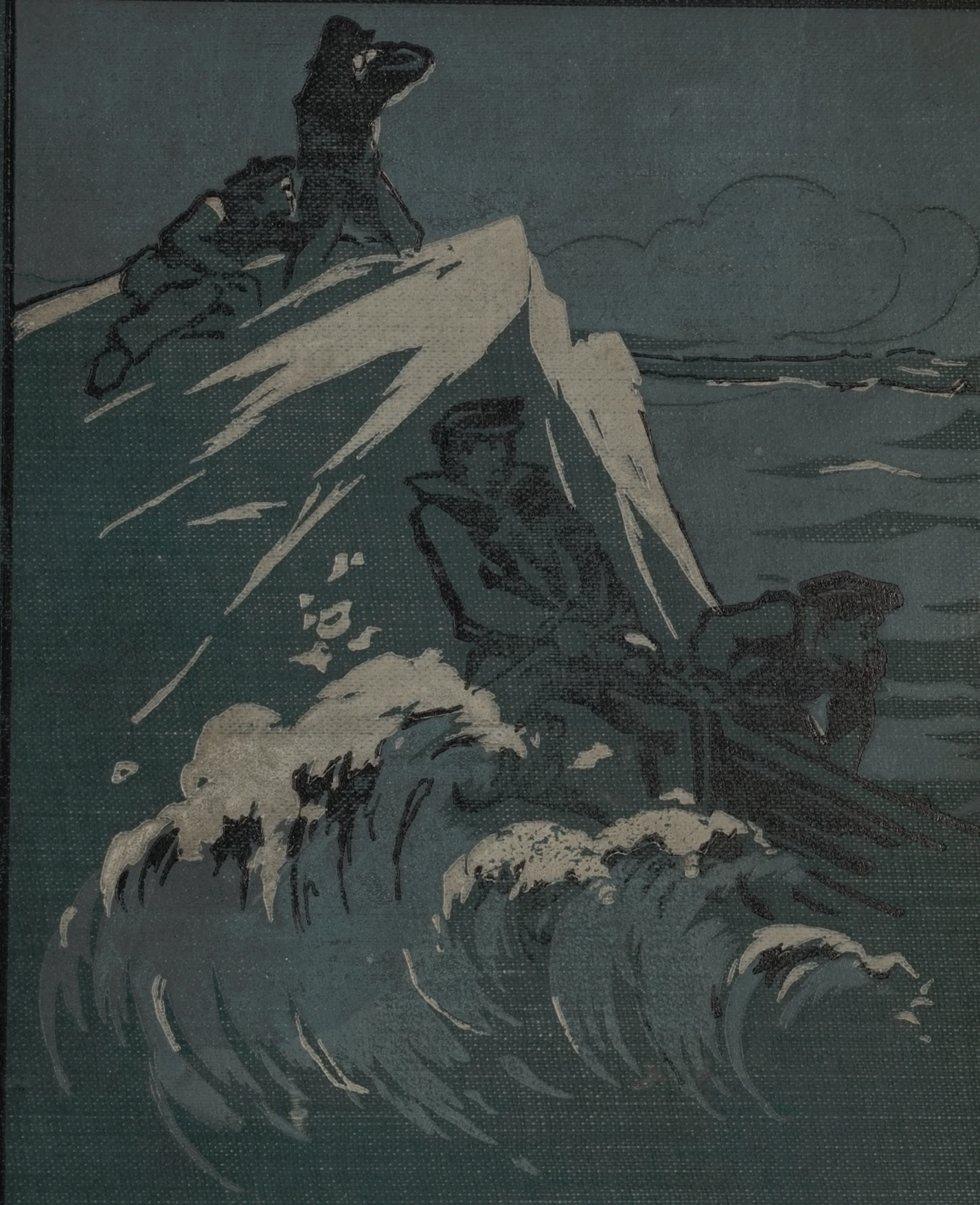

THE MYSTERIOUS BEACON LIGHT

BY GEORGE E. WALSH

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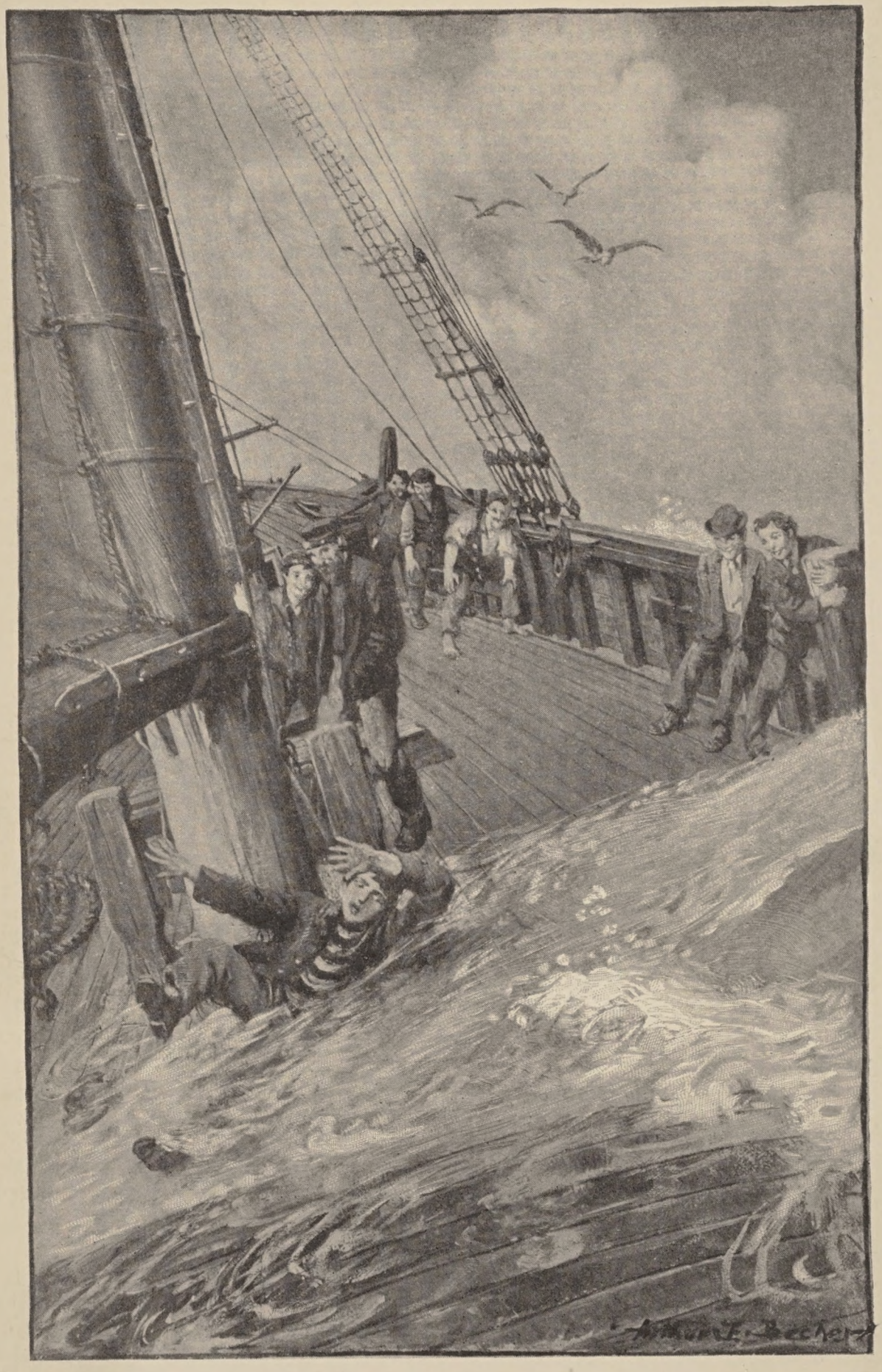


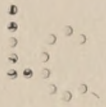
The Mysterious Beacon Light

The Adventures of Four Boys in Labrador

By

George Ethelbert Walsh

Author of "The Mysterious Burglar," "Allin Winfield," etc.



Illustrated by Arthur E. Becher

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The Mysterious Beacon Light

CHAPTER I

"WHERE are you going for your vacation, Louis?"

Frank Williston turned toward the only boy of the group who had not volunteered to tell all about his proposed plans for having a good time during the summer's vacation.

"Yes, Louis, tell us about it," immediately chimed in several of the youthful voices. "Where are you going?"

Louis Pendleton leaned over the top rail of the fence and gazed hard at the bright green of the park. Then, controlling himself, he replied, with an attempt to seem indifferent:

"Oh, I'm not going anywhere. I'm not going to have any vacation!"

There was a chorus of "Ohs!" and "Ahs!" which indicated the sceptical condition of the minds of the speakers.

"Since when did Louis become such a bookworm that he could n't take a vacation?" asked Frank, in a teasing voice.

"Turn him around, boys, so I can study him," added Harold Bainbridge. "He might do for a Barnum show. Has he lost his grip on life, or has he fallen in love?"

Louis smiled desperately at these sallies, for, after all, they did not affect him nearly so much as the reality. He knew that his school companions were chaffing him and did not realize that he was in earnest — in dead earnest.

"Where will you conduct your summer studies, Louis?" asked Warren Pitt, touching him lightly on the arm, and looking beseechingly up into his eyes. "Please tell me of this famous summer school, for I may become a candidate for admission to it."

There was another round of laughter at Louis's expense.

"I did n't say that I should study,"

Louis answered with a little vehemence. "I said I was n't going to take any vacation."

"And not going anywhere," added a voice from the group.

"Well, I 'm not, except home. Yes, I 'll take that back. I am going away, and to a good many places. I 'll probably see more of life of a certain kind than any of you. I 'll probably wander around and cover more ground — or water — than any of you — "

"And yet he won't go anywhere, and won't take any vacation," interrupted Warren, with a smile. "Louis, I fear you prevaricate at times ! "

In spite of his position, and the depression of his feelings, Louis Pendleton laughed at the expression in the eyes of the speaker.

"Oh, come now, you understand what I mean ! " he said finally. "I 'm going home, and then I 'm going to work for a living all summer."

He looked defiantly at the group of faces around him. Then, in a low voice,

he continued: "The fact is, father has lost heavily the past year, — two schooners and one sloop by storm and fire, — and I do not feel that I should loaf this summer. So I 'm going to ship before the mast with father, and sail north with him on the next cruise."

These words had a sobering effect on the boys. They realized by the speaker's serious face that it was not a laughing matter with him. No one spoke, and Louis continued his story.

"Father, you know, has run ships in the coasting trade for years," he went on slowly. "He is a good captain, but he has not been to sea in late years. Mother and I hoped he would never have to go again on a long cruise. But the loss of his schooners last winter and this spring has crippled him. Then, too, trade is dull, and he has decided that he cannot afford to run his last ship under another captain and crew. So I 'm to go with him as companion, cabin-boy, common sailor, and first mate. We 'll save just so much by doing the work ourselves."

In the pause which followed Louis dropped his eyes ; but Frank Williston said abruptly : " But you have n't told us yet where you are going."

" No, and it would n't make much difference. But if you wish to know, it will be to Newfoundland, and from there to Labrador. Father has a cargo to take up there, and he expects to load down with a good return cargo. That is all."

" That is all ? " queried one of the boys. " That is all ? Newfoundland — Labrador! What more could any boy want for one summer's vacation ? Say, Louis, does n't your father want another able seaman ? If so, recommend me."

" And if he wants a second mate, I 'm a candidate," interrupted Warren.

" And I 'll go as cook or cabin-boy," responded Harold.

These words cheered Louis, so that he replied quickly : " Oh, well, I 'll engage all of you on the spot."

There was a general clapping of the hands.

"Agreed! Agreed! We'll hold you to your bargain."

"But how about the wages?"

"We don't want any. Take us along for our grub and bed. We'll work enough to pay for them."

"What could you do on shipboard? How many of you know a jib from a topsail, or a spanker from a bowsprit?"

"Hear him talk! Think he'd been brought up on the sea! A regular salt! Just repeat those words again!"

"Huh! What's the good of his putting on airs?" said Warren. "I was once on a cat-boat, and we capsized, and nobody on board knew we had a centre-board until I discovered it sticking up in the air. What I don't know about cat-boats and ships could n't be held in Louis's head."

"Which reminds me," added Frank, "that I was brought up near the sea, and as a youngster I went out sailing in a skiff which had a spritsail. Since then I've never found a fellow who knew what a spritsail was like. I asked Louis once, and he said that salt-water seamen did n't

condescend to such things. Now listen to him talking about going to sea on a ship as first mate and able seaman!"

The boys joined in a chorus of groans, intended to indicate the supposed state of their minds at such incredulous tales. Louis listened to them in silence, and when they had recovered from their emotions, he said:

"I 'll miss all of you many times, for the cruise will be a lonely one."

"Miss us? Indeed you won't miss us if we go along! Every one of us will remind you of our presence every hour of the day. I thought you knew us better Louis. Have you forgotten the hazing we gave you when you first dared to appear at old Sheffield, or the ducking we gave you under the town pump, two winters ago?"

"But you are not going with me," Louis protested. "You 've already arranged your vacations, and —"

"Did n't you engage us?" demanded Frank, interrupting the speaker. "Then you must stand by your bargain."

Louis laughed at this remark, but answered: "All right! I'll speak for my father, and engage you as able seamen and cabin-boys, if you can go. But I guess some of your fathers and mothers will, put down a foot."

"Then we'll run away and enlist in the service."

"No, that isn't a part of the bargain," Louis replied, shaking his head. "Father would never take a runaway or stowaway to sea with him, if he could help it."

"But he couldn't help it if you smuggled us aboard," added one of the foremost of the boys, eagerly.

"Yes, he would know it, for I wouldn't smuggle you aboard. I'd turn you over to the law officers in the harbor, and let them deal with you."

"Traitor! Miscreant! Hit him!"

This and similar remarks drowned all efforts of Louis to speak further. There was a futile attempt to seize him; but the little scrimmage ended in a general rough-and-tumble struggle, in which every one tried to throw everybody else. When they

finally pulled themselves together, Frank Williston, as the spokesman of the crowd, said soberly:

"But, honest now, Louis, I'm thinking of going with you, if your father would take me along. I'd pay for my board, and do dirty work around deck with you. I'd enjoy the trip more than anything else. I know I can get my father's permission."

Louis turned toward the speaker, and there was a new eagerness in his voice as he said: "Are you in earnest, Frank? If you could only go, we'd certainly have fine times together. I think it would be a summer of work and pleasure for both of us."

"But include me in it too, Louis," interrupted Warren. "I mean it too, when I say that I want to sail with you on this cruise. My plans for the summer are not all made, and I can break them. Don't turn me down. I'll go the same as Frank — pay my way and work too."

"I should like to include all of you," Louis answered, with a little break in his voice. "What better fun could there be

for me than to have you all with me on this long cruise! But I 'm afraid that something will — "

" Nonsense! Don't be afraid of anything! " replied Harold. " I 'm going anyhow. I sha'n't wait for a second invitation. You asked all of us, and I 've accepted. I 'll write home to-morrow and tell my folks that I 'm going."

" And have the governor down on the next train to carry you away home," said Warren, with a good-natured wink.

No attention was paid to this sally, for the serious part of the meeting had been reached. What had been begun in jest promised to prove a far more serious matter than any had imagined. Vacation plans and anticipations were suddenly merged into one dream. Each boy imagined that he could already feel the cooling breezes of the ocean wafted to him off the coast of Labrador. There were visions of long days and moonlight nights on the northern sea. Possible adventures in storms or with whales and icebergs loomed up on their boyish horizon. When they finally

walked away together, with arms locked into arms, they were deep in the mysteries of planning a cruise the like of which no four boys had ever attempted before.

The most astonished of the group was Louis Pendleton. Even when they had made him understand the seriousness of their intentions, he could not believe but that something would come up to balk their plans. There was no harm in weaving possible adventures and pleasant experiences; but he felt that they would never be realized. Still he was pleased by their talk, and, when they separated for the night, he was in nearly as happy and jubilant a state of mind as they. His despondency had suddenly left him. He was once more the eager school-boy, searching for pleasure and sport between the hours of study, hoping for the best, and planning for something brighter and happier for the future.

CHAPTER II

DOWN in New Bedford harbor Captain John Pendleton, ship-owner and master, fitted the *Northern Star* — a three-masted schooner of fifty-tons burden — for a summer's cruise north. The crew was partly engaged, but the fishing was good off the coast, and many able seamen who had shipped before on the *Northern Star* refused to leave their homes for a three months' trip, preferring to follow the fishing vessels in their daily, or fortnightly, trips to the banks. Captain Pendleton had been brought up as a deep-sea mariner, and, before fortune had smiled on him, he had sailed his schooners to nearly all parts of the north Atlantic. He had little patience with "stay-at-home sailors" who thought more of their homes than of their profession. To him, a man's work was the thing to which to sacrifice all else, and one

who hesitated between duty and inclination lost caste in his eyes.

Consequently, when the sailors demurred, and hesitated, and backed out, he lost all patience with them — even losing his temper, it must be admitted. "What are we coming to?" he growled fiercely to one of his old maritime friends. "We don't have deep-water sailors around here any more. They're nothing but landsmen, afraid to sail out of sight of land. It's a fine state of affairs, when the *Northern Star* can't ship a decent crew to sail out of New Bedford."

"You're right, cap'n," answered his old crony, himself a decrepit and worn-out sea-captain. "Times have changed. They ain't no more decent sailors for ships and schooners. I'm glad it didn't come in my day. I think it would have nigh broke my heart."

It was while the captain was in this state of mind that Louis wrote his father asking for berths on the *Northern Star* for his three school friends.

"They are fine strong, healthy fellows,"

his letter explained, "and they will get the consent of their parents. They will go as passengers, but of course they will have to enlist as a part of the crew. They will work and — "

"What tomfoolery!" ejaculated the captain, under his breath.

"I know they can help you a good deal if you should happen to be short-handed," the letter continued; "they will be great company to me, and, I think, after the first few weeks, you will find their services valuable. They don't know anything about ships or the sea, and they may get very seasick and homesick, too; but they have grit, and for the sake of their class, and old Sheffield, they won't give in."

"Louis is sometimes very visionary," blurted out the reader, in a less exasperated voice. "But he 's a practical sailor, and I 'm thankful I taught him how to manage a ship. I suppose, too, he will be very lonely on the cruise."

"Of course, if you don't want them," he read on in the letter, "say so, and I will tell them; but I almost committed

myself to taking them before I consulted you. The fact was, it began all in a joke — "

"A joke, was it!" chuckled the captain. "Well, I guess the joke will be on the boys then."

He turned to renew his reading. It was on the deck of the schooner that he stood. Around him were piled high the cordage and lumber with which the men were working to repair the schooner for her voyage. A man stumbled over the débris, apologetically removed his hat, and said stammeringly:

"Cap'n Pendleton, I — "

"Hello, Joe! That you? Well, what do you want?"

The man twisted his hat nervously in his hands.

"I 've come to say, cap'n," Joe continued, "that — that 'Lidy Ann has got the measles, and how her ma feels so kinder out of sorts that she is lonesome without me. She don't mind my going off to the fishin' banks, and round here for a few days at a time, — fur a man 's got to

live and work, — but she is greatly sot on my not going — "

"Come to the point, Joe," interrupted Captain Pendleton. "You don't want to go with me on this trip."

"Well, cap'n, seein' I had n't signed with you yet, and only promised to go if everything was favorable, I think I 'll have to ask you to let me off. A man must think of his wife first, and — "

"No, sir!" thundered Captain Pendleton, in a voice that made Joe jump back two feet. "No, sir, a man must think first of his duty, and then of his wife!"

"Of course! Of course!" assented frightened Joe, not knowing exactly what he was saying. "I know it, cap'n; but then, you see, there 's 'Lidy Ann, and she 's got the measles. You could n't ask me to leave her!"

"Yes, I could, for she would be better off without you," replied the captain, in the same fierce voice. "You know well enough you won't work half the time if you stay home, and you 'll bother 'Lidy Ann and her mother half to death. If you

go with me, you 'll save up money, and they 'll be glad to see you coming home. Now, sir, can you deny that?"

"No, no, cap'n, I can't. It 's God's truth — but — "

Captain Pendleton's face changed. It had an expression of pity, rather than of anger, on it. Poor cringing Joe noted the change, and his own lighted up with hope.

"I won't hold you to your agreement, Joe," the captain said slowly. "You can stay home with 'Lidy Ann and her measles; but, mark my word, you 'll be sorry for it. I'll make good wages for all. But I have engaged my crew. I 've found some good seamen who will come down from Boston next week to ship with me."

"Boston seamen, eh?" ejaculated Joe, his curiosity showing in his staring eyes. "What sort of men be they, cap'n?"

"Good sailors who are not afraid to get out of sight of land," was the short answer.

Captain Pendleton turned as if to terminate the interview, but Joe was not satisfied. Here was a piece of town gossip that he would have to sift to its founda-

tion. Besides, New Bedford men were jealous of imported sailors. Why did New Bedford captains go to Boston to hire sailors to sail on home ships?

"I suppose they are not New Bedford folks," Joe began timidly, remembering that many New Bedford boys had sailed to foreign ports from Boston.

"No, they are not New Bedford men," replied Captain Pendleton. "Not one of them — except my son — ever saw New Bedford."

"Then they are from — from — "

A curious smile played around Captain Pendleton's lips, as he answered: "They are from school; but they'll make better sailors than most of you fellers here in New Bedford."

Joe did not curl his lips in disdain, for he had misunderstood the purport of the reply. He answered gravely instead: "I've heard the naval schools do turn out good sailors. They are right smart as officers, and sometimes they make good seamen. There's Squire Johnson's boy, who went through the — some naval school, — and

he 's now captain of his own ship. They say he knows a lot about the sea."

"Yes, but not more than you lazy fellows could if you 'd put a little ambition in your work. I 'd pit New Bedford boys against any in the world, on a ship, if they 'd only wake up; but they won't."

Joe sighed heavily.

"It 's true, captain, but you can't expect me, with 'Lidy Ann, and — "

"No, no, Joe, not when she had the measles," interrupted Captain Pendleton, with a laugh. "But let me see, last year she had the mumps, when you wanted to go with Captain Smith, and the year before that her ma had the chicken-pox, and 'Lidy Ann had to go and take that from her. Say, Joe, when she 's had all the diseases, let me know, and I 'll come around and make you sign for a voyage. There can't be more than a dozen more diseases left for poor 'Lidy Ann. If she survives them, I think she 'll be able to get along without you."

"I hope she won't die with any of them," sighed Joe, looking across the harbor in the direction of his humble home.

"No fear, Joe. She's had too many to die of any one now. She'll outlive you by forty years."

"Think so, cap'n? I dunno! I dunno! She 'pears to be complaining a good deal nowadays."

Captain Pendleton placed a hand on his shoulder. "The complaining kind never die, Joe," he said kindly, "or at least, not until all the good ones are dead. Now go home and tell 'Lidy Ann you're going to stay behind and nurse her. The *Northern Star* has shipped a full crew, and she will sail next week."

"No unkind feelings toward me, I hope, cap'n?"

"None whatever, Joe. I could n't have any if I wanted to."

A few minutes later, Joe stumbled over the loose cordage and pieces of wood to the dock beyond. He mumbled to himself, and looked eagerly around for some old friend to whom to impart his news. The first old inhabitant he met was duly informed that the *Northern Star* had shipped part of its crew from Boston.

The men were engaged from a naval school, and they would come down the following week to sail. Joe was a comparatively old man, but his imagination was fertile and vivid. He added a little to his tale — bit by bit — until, by the time he reached home, he had spread the story among his shipmates of New Bedford that the *Northern Star* was bound for the whaling regions off the coast of Labrador, where it was known that a rich prize of oil awaited her. Scientific men from the naval school had located the whales in their summer sporting grounds, and the sailors had been sent down to help Captain Pendleton in his search.

So thoroughly accepted were these stories that, before night, a dozen New Bedford men had offered to sign articles with Captain Pendleton, and sail with him on the *Northern Star.* It was only after several of them had dropped a hint or two that Captain Pendleton realized the cause of this change of sentiment.

"It 's all Joe's work," he chuckled to himself. "He 's been telling fairy tales, as

usual. Well, I won't say anything. But to think that Louis and his three youngsters should have caused such a sensation in New Bedford, and made the *Northern Star* so popular! I 'll tell them some time, but not now. I 'll have tó write Louis that they must dress up in sailor clothes before they strike New Bedford. We 'll carry out the farce until we get out to sea."

CHAPTER III

A WEEK later, when four trim-looking but very youthful seamen dropped off the train at New Bedford, and wended their way toward the pretty home of Captain Pendleton, no one would recognize in them the Sheffield school-boys who had arranged to take their vacation on a coasting schooner, bound for the coast of Labrador. They had purchased good, substantial seamen's clothes in Boston, and, under the critical eye of Louis, they deported themselves as if the future sailing of all vessels depended upon their appearances.

"Look lively, now, to your steps," cautioned Louis, with a suppressed grin. "Don't stare at people, and get a roll on you when you walk. It will be time enough to play the greenhorn when you're seasick on board the *Northern*

Star. You 'll all be laid up in your bunks before to-morrow night."

There were dozens of critical eyes watching them. At the railway station and at the wharf, they were surveyed with mingled emotions of condemnation and praise. Old salts who had travelled in ships around the world, and hardened fishermen of the banks, watched them, and critically commented upon their appearance. Various were the remarks directed at them, and not always in an undertone.

"Shucks, they ain't sailors," muttered one old deep-water sailor. "They 're greenies from nowhere!"

"They 're from the naval school," replied old Joe, promptly, who had been somewhat dazzled by the new suits. "They know lots about navigation and such things."

"I 'll bet they can't reef a sail or haul a sheet," answered the first speaker.

"Naw, but they look all right," added a third speaker. "They look as if they knew what they were about."

"They look like nice young boys—

mere kids," disgustedly replied the deep-water seaman, turning away from the group.

"Yes, they may be young," commented another. "But Cap'n Pendleton ought to know what he's about."

The *Northern Star* did not sail from New Bedford short-handed. Louis was a capable sailor, and, under his father's directions, he could act the part of first mate, with rare skill. He had been brought up on the sea from boyhood, and every summer had found him studying navigation on one of his father's ships. The three boys were merely counted as superfluous cargo, although they were shipped as able seamen before the mast. The shipping laws did not permit the *Northern Star* to carry passengers, but any one could go on her who was willing to appear on the ship's books as a part of the crew.

There were eight other members of the crew, all good New Bedford men and capable of handling the *Northern Star* in any kind of weather. Counting the boys as able seamen, the schooner carried a large

crew for her. In her last trip ten men had manned her with ease, and she had passed through some pretty rough weather.

Although designated as able seamen, the four boys were given bunks in the captain's cabin. Louis and Frank bunked on one side of the small cabin, and Harold and Warren on the opposite. This allotment created a little wonder among the rest of the crew, but they were not the kind to grumble. It gave them more room in their quarters, which had promised to be rather crowded with twelve men. Besides the sailors had begun to suspect something before the *Northern Star* was well out of New Bedford harbor. The new sailors from Boston did not obey orders with alacrity, and when they did attempt it, they made bungling movements. They tried to coil the loose ropes on the deck, Louis showing them how; but every seaman who passed them laughed at the results.

"Say, Johnny, did they teach you to coil a rope that way in Boston?" asked one of the New Bedford men, as he

watched Frank toiling painfully at his task.

"No, but I was trying the New Bedford way," answered Frank, promptly. "Louis said that's the way they do the thing down here."

The man laughed at this reply, and hurried back to his post without answering.

A short time out, the *Northern Star* struck head winds and met the first of the rollers coming in from the open sea. The first heavy sea which struck her found Warren unprepared for it. He felt, rather than saw, the deck rise up before him, and, in his vain effort to catch himself before the ship rolled to the other side, he lost his balance completely, and rolled over on the deck. He heard a laugh from the stern, where the New Bedford men were grouped; but what made his face flush with mortification was to catch a glimpse of Louis and his father. There was a broad grin on the former's face, and a hardly-suppressed smile on the captain's. Warren picked himself up, and staggered, rather than walked, toward his companions.

"You have your sea legs early, Warren," remarked Frank, who was clinging rather dubiously to the rail. "But it 's a little unkind of you to try to show them off ahead of us, for you know it makes us envious."

Warren did not reply until he reached the rail. Then, recovering his equilibrium, he said: "Frank, I lost my knife out of my pocket when I slipped up on that orange peel. If you 'll go and get it for me, it 's yours to keep."

To this challenge Frank merely shrugged his shoulders and looked seaward. There was a strong breeze blowing from the ocean, and the white caps ahead looked cold and forbidding. He felt a queer sensation of uncertainty as to whether or not he had made a mistake in taking his vacation in this way. The land, which was rapidly fading from view, was, after all, a place of great happiness and pleasure. It would be weeks before he would tread it again.

"The offer is open to you, Harold," Warren continued. "Frank is getting homesick — and may be seasick."

To resent this unfounded accusation, Frank turned his attention quickly from the sea and thoughts of home, and replied: "I don't care for your old knife, Warren; but I 'll never turn down a dare from you, and I won't say I slipped up on any orange peel, if I do fall. I 'll be true to my name, and confess it was the rolling of the ship."

"All right, Frank," Warren replied sweetly. "I 'll be much obliged to you for getting the knife, and if you won't keep it, I 'll lend it to you once in a while. Now let us see you walk a straight line toward it."

Frank braced himself for the effort, caught his breath, and started away from his support. He took three steps forward without difficulty, then stopped as the ship reared her head mountain-ward. When she began to descend in the trough of the sea, he stepped forward again three more steps. "Ah, I catch on now!" he shouted gleefully. "You step forward only when the ship is going down the side of a wave, and stand still when she 's rising. Why, it 's dead easy!"

This philosophy seemed to bear excellent fruit, for Frank made good progress without any mishap. In fact, he reached the place where Warren had fallen, and gloatingly looked down at the knife. The problem of picking it up suddenly appeared more complicated than that of walking the deck. Once he stooped forward a little, but the ship plunged upward, and the deck seemed determined to strike him in the head. He straightened himself, and made another effort, when the schooner heeled up its stern with a sudden lurch. But the tendency to sprawl forward on the deck was almost too much for Frank's nerve, and he dared not lean down to disturb his equilibrium.

"Come, Frank, I'm waiting for my knife!" shouted Warren.

There was a ripple of laughter from several parts of the deck, and Frank, smarting under it, gathered himself together for one final effort. By this time the whole crew was intently watching him, enjoying the sport as much as the boys. Never before on football or baseball field had he

felt quite so helpless and chagrined. The waves were increasing in size and number, and, what Frank did not observe, there were several heavy cross seas sweeping in from the southwest. These reached the *Northern Star* just as Frank was ready for his one desperate attempt to recover the knife.

He leaned forward quickly and grasped the knife in his hand; but, as he tried to straighten his body, a giant comber struck the schooner amidships, and swept clean across her. The result was that Frank was plunged sideways, and rolled and tossed over on the deck. He felt the water splashing in his eyes and mouth, wetting him through to the skin, and carrying him across the deck as if he had been a piece of cork. In vain he clutched at the slippery deck, gasping and coughing, and making the most ridiculous of gyrations. One moment his feet were in the air, and then his head, while his hands beat the empty air without intermission.

For a few moments it seemed to the boy as if he had been plunged into the ocean, and he frantically tried to swim against

the force of the water. But it was all of short duration. He struck against the rail on the opposite side of the schooner with a sudden bump which bruised nearly every bone in his body.

He next felt a strong arm around him, and one of the New Bedford seamen said: "Don't go overboard, my boy, or we 'll have to leave you behind for shark's food."

Frank cleared his eyes and mouth of the salt water, and tried to stand upright, clinging to his rescuer. The schooner was now passing out of the cross seas, and her roll was more evenly up and down. With the help of the sailor, he crossed the deck to his companions.

"Where 's my knife?" asked Warren, writhing with merriment.

"I — I — did n't I get it?" stammered Frank, looking blankly at his empty hands.

Chagrined at his misfortune, Frank could only shiver and stare gloomily toward the distant shore. A glimpse of old Sheffield's green lawn just then would have been a welcome sight. The sea had fewer charms than he had ever imagined.

"Never mind, Frank," said Louis by his side. "Here's the knife. I picked it up just as it was being washed overboard. You got it all right, but you forgot to hold it in the struggle with the water."

"And he's our football captain!" ejaculated Harold, in mock surprise. "He'd fine us for dropping a football like that, just because a dozen fellows were climbing all over us."

Frank, the redoubtable football player, for the first time in his life looked with envy at the quiet strength and grace of Louis, who, without apparent effort, stood firmly on the rolling deck, his form keeping in rhythmic motion with the ship's strange antics. Admiring him in silence, he forgot his embarrassment and mortification, and suddenly exclaimed: "Louis, I'd give a good deal for your pair of legs on this trip. How long will it take me to find my sea legs?"

"Anywhere from a week to several months," was the reply. "It all depends upon the man."

CHAPTER IV

FRANK found the secret of walking a sloping deck in a storm in a short time, and Warren and Harold were not much behind him; but their experiences were both varied and exciting before they acquired the knack of retaining their equilibrium under all circumstances. To make matters worse, seasickness overtook them in turn, and, for two days and nights, they were weak and helpless, so that they retired to their bunks in a condition of morbid unhappiness. The sea trip was suddenly bereft of all its charms. They wished they were back home, and they began to blame Louis for all their troubles.

"I should be on my way to Colorado by this time if it had n't been for Louis," muttered Harold.

"And I should be in the mountains, fishing and canoeing," said Warren, with equal anger.

"Don't talk of it," said Frank, with set teeth. "I can't bear to think of what I've missed. I was going to take a trip through the Great Lakes, and here I am carted off to sea by Louis. It's an outrage!"

"He misrepresented the whole thing to us."

"He deserves all that he will get, if we ever reach shore alive."

Louis's face was suddenly thrust into the cabin, and he called out to the conspirators: "Come, come, any more of that talk will land you in the brig. On the sea, mutiny is an offence that the captain and his officers can put down with any kind of punishment."

"Oh, you can do anything with me!" groaned Frank. "I'm sick of the whole thing and the world too."

Yet within forty-eight hours a new interest took possession of the seasick youngsters, and they would have blushed with shame at their words of despair. One by one, they raised their heads from their bunks, and, with dull eyes, peered through the deadlights of the cabin.

"I say, Frank, the sun is shining," remarked Warren, suddenly, as if the fact had just dawned upon him that there was ever a sunny day on the ocean.

The remark did not seem at all trite to Frank, for he added another equally inane statement. Then Harold reflected, as he supported his head with his hands:

"I think I'll get up; a breath of fresh air will make me feel better."

"I'm anxious to get up on deck, too," Frank replied. "But I'm terribly weak, and my stomach is so empty and hollow."

"Mine feels like a balloon when it's flattened out," Warren said.

Three gaunt, pale figures dressed themselves in the cabin, resting often; but finally they were ready to go on deck. They stood in a bunch at the foot of the companion-way; a delightful whiff of salt air came down to them, but they hesitated.

"You go first, Frank," Warren said.

But Frank had forgotten something in the cabin, and rushed back for it. "Go ahead!" he exclaimed. "I'll come as soon as I get—"

The rest of the sentence was smothered in the distance. Harold turned up his nose and sniffed the air. "Afraid of facing the music," he said scornfully. "Well, I'll go first."

Frank returned just in time to lose his position on the stairway, but not too late to hear the remark.

"I'll go first!" he shouted, a little ashamed of his actions.

But Harold had already stepped on deck, and Warren was close behind him. The ship was sailing calmly over a peaceful sea, with no land in sight, and with no clouds floating in the clear sky overhead. There was hardly a perceptible roll to the sea, and the seabirds were skimming over its surface in great flocks. Here and there the bright flash of a fish leaping from the water, or the roll of a porpoise as it rose from the top of a wave, reflected the sun's rays like a burnished mirror. A gentle breeze was filling the sails, and, above their heads, the topsails were blowing out like balloons tugging at their anchor ropes ready for an ascension. The three boys

stood a moment, charmed by the quiet, peaceful scene, and scarcely conscious of the presence of any one else on the ship.

Then a sudden, sharp exclamation echoed back of them. "Hello there, mates! How goes the hospital?"

Louis appeared from behind a cloud of canvas that had been hauled on deck for repairing. Back of him stood several of the sailors, grinning behind upraised hands, and trying hard not to appear too interested in the scene.

"Well, I 'm glad to see you 've come to life again, and also to your senses," Louis continued, approaching them. "Why, half an hour ago you were all blubbering for home and nursing-bottle. Now you look like something again; but you are thin, very thin. Come down with me, and I 'll get the cook to fill you up. You need it badly."

He took Frank by the arm; but all three hung back. "We want the fresh air, and none of your dishwater soup," said Frank, defiantly, "Let go, Louis, or I shall strike you."

"Still insubordinate? Well, I 'll report the matter to the captain. He excused you before, but this time I 'm not so sure. He 's in a very bad humor to-day. The cook served him up coffee, this morning, made of ground beans, and it disturbed his digestion. But here he comes himself! Let him speak for himself! Salute!"

Captain Pendleton surveyed the three youngsters with a merry twinkle in his eyes. Then he said in a fatherly voice:

"Feel better, boys? Well, you 'll pull through all right after this. The first seasickness rather takes the starch out of a landsman. It 's a good thing you were not regular paid sailors, or you 'd been hauled up long before this to help trim sheets."

He walked on to where the sailors were mending the old sail, but there followed in his wake a little chuckle which brought the blush of mortification to the faces of the boys. Louis, having had his fun out of the situation, now spoke suddenly in a different voice, and cheered them by his manner and words.

"Come now, this has been your initiation," he said. "You fellows had the gag on me when you hazed me at Sheffield, and half drowned me under the town pump. Now I've got even with you. You'll find it easier after this. You need n't put on the airs of sailors any more, for the men know all about it. They will give you a chance to pick up a few nautical ways and words that you are sorely in need of. I'll introduce you to some of the men."

Not unwillingly they followed him to a hard-handed old seaman whom Louis introduced in this way: "This is Mr. Barrows, our second mate, commonly called 'Mate Ned.' Where he has n't sailed in these northern waters is n't worth seeing. Some night he'll tell you of his experiences, and you won't sleep for a week after listening to him."

Then, turning away from the boys, he continued, addressing Mate Ned: "These are the three runaways from Sheffield School, masquerading as able seamen from old Joe's unnamed naval school.

They 're pretty green yet, but we hope to make something of them before we get home. Give them plenty of hard work, when they need it, and trice them up by the thumbs if they don't obey orders."

Without waiting for more than a perfunctory exchange of words, Louis hurried them past the second mate, and drew them up, military-fashion, before another short, thick-set, grizzled seaman.

"Here we are, bos'n," he exclaimed, "I have them in tow, the whole crew of 'em, ringleader and all. They 're all guilty of sailing under false colors. Not one of 'em knows a sail from a bedquilt. They are n't exactly stowaways, but something worse. They expect to draw pay, when they can't even scrub a deck decently. What should the punishment be?"

The bos'n laughed, and extended a cordial hand to the boys.

"Glad to see you on deck again," he said. "You 'll feel better after this. The air is very bracing to-day, and you 'll be as hungry as bears before night."

"Seems to me you are interfering with

the discipline of this ship," Louis said stiffly. "If I report you to the captain, he 'll — "

The bos'n smiled, and asked, in an equally dramatic voice:

"Who 's officer of the deck, sir?"

"Ay, ay, that 's it! — who is officer of the deck?"

"I am!" was the quick response of the bos'n.

Louis made a profound bow, and replied:

"I withdraw my remarks, bos'n, and humbly beg to introduce my three friends from Boston — Frank, Warren, and Harold. The rest does n't amount to much, but you 'll learn it soon enough from them. They are capable of more wickedness to the square inch than any trio I know of. I warn you in time, so that if anything happens to you, it cannot be laid up against me."

Thus Louis introduced the three to their shipmates, selecting the officers and seamen in turn, according to their rank or service on his father's ships. They were all, in reality, old New Bedford men who

had sailed many years under Captain Pendleton or some of his officers. They were more like a family or club of friends than an ordinary crew of mixed seamen. They were fully acquainted with the captain's peculiarities, and with Louis's methods of fun-making. To them, the whole farce was entertaining and amusing. They understood the whole story, even to old Joe's exaggerated accounts of Captain Pendleton's shipping naval cadets to man his ship.

CHAPTER V

THE sail northward to the coast of Newfoundland was unbroken by any adventure to the boys; but the days and evenings were filled with experiences that were not soon to be forgotten. The weather was almost ideal, and, after their period of seasickness, the three amateur sailors found their pleasures increasing almost in direct proportion to their ignorance of all things nautical. The seamen found plenty of time hanging on their hands in which to instruct the boys in the mysteries of handling the sails, and, within a fortnight, Frank, Harold, and Warren were taking turns at the wheel. The experience was all the more interesting, since all three boys had been reared in inland cities where knowledge of the sea was chiefly second-hand.

"At this rate we shall soon be able to draw full pay of an able seaman," said

Frank one day, as they were nearing the coast of Newfoundland.

Louis, standing nearby, smiled and said:

"You remember when I first went on your scrub football team, Frank? Well, after a week's practice, I thought I knew it all. Remember my attempting to tell you how to tackle in better style than you were training the boys?"

Frank looked steadily toward the foremast, watching the sail fluttering against the background of fleecy clouds.

"Don't see what that has to do with sailing a ship," he replied, without removing his eyes from the sail.

"No, but you may some day."

This prediction came true sooner than any of the boys expected. The *Northern Star* ran into its first summer storm after they had sighted Newfoundland heights, with its rocky islands and promontories jutting far out into the sea. They had been sailing quietly and leisurely along, with the lead, at every half mile, announcing shallower water. The few fleecy clouds in the heavens seemed to portend no dis-

aster; but suddenly the water ahead was rippled into little vibrating white caps which moved rapidly toward the ship. Louis was standing with his back toward the shore, and his three companions were engaged in discussing some point about their future plans. A puff of wind suddenly struck the schooner with such violence that she heeled far over on her side, and the sails and rigging creaked under the strain. In an instant there was the greatest commotion on the deck.

Captain Pendleton was in his cabin, and Louis and the second mate had all they could do to hold the schooner up into the wind. With sharp orders, they made the sailors shorten sail. The waves swept the deck and wet everything down. Two able seamen brushed Frank aside and caught the wheel from his hands. In fact, the amateur sailors realized the difference then between a fair weather sailor and the genuine article. The wind howled and screamed through the rigging, blowing a gale, dashing the spray high above their heads, and wetting every one to the skin,

sending an icy chill down their backs. So violent was the small hurricane that three more frightened boys never before stood on the deck of a ship. They expected every moment to see the schooner go over on her beams' ends and founder in the great waves which rose up, as if by magic, to bewilder it. The sharp reports made by the creaking and twanging of the rigging were like pistol-shots, and they helped to add to the fear and helplessness of the boys.

Once Captain Pendleton crossed the deck close to them, and shouted in his stentorian voice: "Go below, or you 'll be blown overboard!"

But he might as well have ordered them to swim ashore. They were clinging to the rail of the schooner for dear life. Each succeeding wave threatened to break their hold and sweep them into the sea. They would gladly have retired below decks; but how were they to reach the companion-way? Dim remembrances of their early attempt to walk the throbbing, rolling deck of the schooner occurred to them,

and Frank, in particular, wondered if all his training and experience of the past fortnight counted for nothing. He could not move from his position without endangering his life.

Suddenly out of the blinding roar something seemed to snap and crash close to them, and they could hear Louis shouting:

"Lash yourself to the rail! Quick, for here comes the worst of it!"

The rope was wound around their bodies and tied to the stout rail of the schooner. With trembling bodies, the boys waited for the worst. It hardly seemed possible that anything more terrifying could happen without sending them to the bottom of the sea.

But while they waited, they could see the schooner twist her head up into the wind, and while she stood there, trembling and shivering like a great frightened bird, a demoniacal howl burst from the sky, and enveloped them in its awful noise.

The boys gasped for breath as a great wave completely covered them with its

foam. Like half-drowned rats, they shook their heads and bodies, to cast off the water which had drenched them; but another wave followed so closely upon the first that they could not catch their breath. Great quantities of salt water were swallowed, and still the giant waves came tearing over the sides of the ship. They might have been struggling in the sea itself, so far as their experiences were concerned, and, for a long time, not one of the boys could realize that he was on the deck of a ship that was successfully withstanding the shocks of wind and waves, and slowly but surely riding out the storm in safety.

More dead than alive, they finally fell on the deck, clutching at each other and the rail for support. They made no noise, no outcry, for the sea was so great that they had no opportunity to raise their voices. Meanwhile, it had grown dark, as if night had suddenly fallen. Vivid flashes of lightning lit up the dimness occasionally, and the roll of the thunder echoed like the distant roar of artillery.

From out of this darkness and babel of sounds, the boys could occasionally hear the voice of the captain, or of one of his officers, giving orders to the men. By the glare of the lightning flashes, they caught glimpses of the sailors running up the rigging, or toiling in mid-air with the sails. To their minds, it seemed as if no human being could live in the rigging amid such a chaos of sounds and crashes; but the impression brought relief to their minds. The orders of the officers, and the sight of the seamen obeying them, brought home to their minds an acute sense of relief. So long as the ship was in the hands of Captain Pendleton and his crew, there was a chance left for them; they were not yet lost.

Dimly and vaguely this idea was impressed upon their minds, when suddenly, out of the darkness, a form loomed up near them, and a hand was stretched out to touch them. The magnifying effect of the peculiar light made the form seem unearthly and gigantic in size. For a moment the three huddled forms dreaded

to speak, fearing lest it was some phantom, some uncanny spook of the sea.

But their fears were abated when Louis spoke. The giant statue seemed to shrivel to its normal size, and they saw only the welcome face of their school companion.

"Are you all right, Frank — Warren — Harold?" gasped Louis, struggling with the names in the wind. "Are you all here, lashed to the rail? That 's good! It will blow over in a few minutes."

"What is it?" gasped Harold. "Are we wrecked?"

"No, we are all right, except for a few torn sails. It 's one of these summer storms that strike ships up here, when off the coast. They don't last long, and they are rarely disastrous."

"I should think," stammered Warren, "that this was an awful one."

"Oh, no, I 've seen worse. You 'll get used to them in time."

"I hope I 'll never get into another one," said Frank. "I know I 'd never get used to them."

"I thought so too, when I met my first

one," Louis replied, bracing himself to receive a big wave that broke over the deck.

Louis started to move away again, but a detaining hand touched his arm. "Don't leave us," said the appealing voice of Warren. "We want you here. You sort of make us — give us courage."

"All right! I'll stay until the sun comes out again. I know how you feel. A fellow does seem pretty helpless in the face of such a sea and wind. Old seamen never forget their first experience in a storm, and you need n't think your feelings are different from others. It 's not cowardice, but simply a sense of utter helplessness. A sailor soon learns the trick of taking advantage of every wave and puff of wind, and, until then, he feels as weak and frightened as you do."

While he was speaking, the wind appeared to subside, and the waves grow less violent. Louis noticed it, and, pointing upward, exclaimed: "See, there is the break in the storm. We 'll be sailing on a sunny sea inside of half an hour."

The clouds were parting and changing rapidly. The dark, cumulous mass of whirling vapor was passing away across the eastern horizon, and a soft shaded yellow light followed in its wake. The wind dropped to an ordinary gale. Then, where the sun was struggling to break through the clouds, a luminous path of light fell aslant the ocean. The curious appearance of the sky and sea attracted all eyes, and they stared with wonder at the sight.

Then, before any one could speak, a rift of blue sky appeared in the west. Driven before the wind, the clouds parted rapidly, and the blue patch widened as if by magic. To complete the wonderful change, the sun burst from its prison of overhanging vapor, and spread a glorious light over the tossing sea of foam. It made the wet sails and spars glisten as if coated with ice. The deck of the schooner was like a mass of burnished metal, reflecting the rays in prismatic hues.

So entrancing was the view, after the enshrouding darkness of the storm, that no one could frame adequate expressions.

The exclamations of astonishment were uttered without articulate meaning. The schooner was still rolling and tossing on the waves, and she looked limp and bedraggled. Some of her topsails were loose and limp, and others were entirely missing. The shrouds were already filled with sailors climbing to the crosstrees to put the injured rigging in something like working order. Louis was needed for this work, and he said:

"Now we are out of it, and I 'll leave you. There 's plenty of work to do. You 'll have a chance to learn this part of a sailor's duty now."

Frank rose from his position and stretched his aching limbs. "I think I 've learned a good deal already," he said. Then, in a confidential voice, he added:

"I guess, Louis, I understand now the connection between your giving advice to the football team and my sailing this ship. I 've had my eyes opened."

Louis said nothing as he hurried away, but his smile meant much.

CHAPTER VI

THE *Northern Star* touched at St. John's a few days later, but there was little shore leave, for Captain Pendleton was anxious to reach Labrador in time to discharge his cargo and load up with one of whale oil and sealskins, before the summer began to wane. In the northern latitude, which they soon entered after rounding Cape Race, the temperature showed a perceptible change. The nights in particular were cool, and the days pleasant and bracing. Day after day the schooner pointed due north, and then, on a certain morning, the course was laid northeast, until Cape Race was passed.

This storm centre was given a wide berth. For days and nights the schooner kept far beyond the sight of land. Once they caught a glimpse of the Cape Race light, flashing in the distance, but it did not last long. Even that was too close

to the dangerous shoals and rocky headlands to suit Captain Pendleton.

"We are safer well out from the point," Louis explained. "The tides and currents are strong off the cape, and a sea of cross-currents could overwhelm a ship of this size, if a storm should come up. So we keep away, and, if the weather gets heavy, we will go still farther out to sea."

Beyond Cape Race, the course was once more shifted. This time it was laid almost north by west, or north-northwest, as the compass indicated.

"Now we'll strike cool currents and winds," Captain Pendleton explained to the boys, one afternoon, as they stood on the forward deck. "We are directly in the line of the icebergs, floating down from the north."

"Shall we see one?" eagerly asked Warren.

"Yes, many of them," the captain answered with a smile.

"And probably feel one, too, if we are not careful," volunteered Louis. "We'll have to look out for them day and night."

"Yes, an extra watch is kept from now on," his father added. "In fact, only last night, Ned told me that he saw suspicious signs of a berg in the distance. See those cakes of ice floating around the ship now? Well, they were broken from some berg as it toppled over in the water."

"I should like to see a real iceberg," Frank ventured to remark. "I've read enough about them."

"Sometimes they are very troublesome and expensive things to meet on the sea," Louis said, as his father walked away. "It was an iceberg that caused father to take this trip."

"How was that?" asked several voices in unison.

"Why, an iceberg lost him his biggest schooner, the *Nancy Brown*, last summer up in these latitudes, and he felt so poor that he had to come up himself this season to run his own ship. I think he has a notion that he'll get some word of the *Nancy's* whereabouts. She has never been reported since the day the sailors deserted her. If she did n't go straight

to the bottom of the sea, — and wooden ships don't very often sink, — she must be still floating around somewhere. It seems as if some ship would have reported her before this, if she is a derelict. There is a possibility that some fishermen picked her up, and are using her along the coast. At any rate, father is curious to know what has become of her. He has never said as much, but I think he is going to hurry up in loading, and then cruise up and down the coast to see if he can get any tidings of her. It is just possible that she drifted into some of these coves or bays, and stranded there. This coast is a wild and uninhabited place, and a ship might lie stranded here for years before anybody would find her."

"Tell us how the iceberg destroyed her," Warren said, as Louis stopped in his narrative.

"It was simple enough, but very exciting for those on board," Louis continued. "She was returning home with a good cargo of oil, sealskins, and dried fish, when she ran into an iceberg. It was on a chilly, foggy night, not far off the

harbor of Bain. She was headed nearly southeast, making good time in spite of fog and adverse tides. There was a double lookout watching for icebergs.

"It was early in the evening when the fog settled down denser than ever, and an unusually cold wave seemed to sweep across the bow of the ship. The watchmen at first did not pay much attention to it, but simply buttoned up their coats and paced the deck. Without warning, then, the iceberg loomed up out of the darkness, directly ahead. It was like an immense ghost. At first the sailors could only gasp in wonderment. The great icy mass towered over them, with big pinnacles of white hanging down even above the tops of the masts. The men had barely time to utter a cry of warning, when the collision occurred.

"The *Nancy* was a fast sailer, and she was moving along at ten knots an hour when she struck. She poked her nose straight into a crevice in the berg, so far that it would have taken a dozen tugs to pull it out again.

"At first there was nothing but a dull crunching noise made by the *Nancy's* bow forcing itself into the crevice. Then, after the first crash and awful stillness which followed, there was a roar like an express train rolling down an embankment. The great mass of broken ice came toppling over on the deck, crushing the sails, rigging, and masts into splinters, killing four men outright, and injuring several others. The deck was piled twenty feet high with broken ice, and the schooner would have been sunk at once by the load, had she not been wedged in her narrow hole in the berg.

"For some time the seamen were too frightened to do anything. Most of those on deck were killed or injured, but those below deck were shut in by the masses of ice. They could not get out to help the few survivors above. It was a terrible scene that night. The sailors worked hard to clear up the decks and release those imprisoned below. Finally they hauled away enough ice from the companion-way so that the men could crawl out. Then the

whole crew set to work to help the injured. They were not dangerously hurt, but they were carried below and given what medical assistance the captain could think of.

"All that night they worked to clear away the ice from the decks, but it was impossible to make much headway. They were so close to the berg that the air was as cold and chilly as on a winter's day, and the small pieces of ice, washed by the sea, actually froze together and formed one solid mass over the decks.

"No crew ever watched more anxiously for dawn than did that of the unfortunate *Nancy*. When the sun did come up, it could hardly reach them on account of the ice. They were then completely hemmed in by the berg, except on the side where the schooner had struck. The sun could not melt the ice on the ship, and the men seemed fated to a terrible death.

"It was late in the summer then, and, up here, winter begins early. The danger was that the ship could not be extricated in time to sail south, before the waters froze up around them. In that case, they

would not only be imprisoned on the ship, but in the ice itself, and never come forth to tell their story. They drifted around for days and nights, working hard to move the *Nancy*, or cut her free from the berg. But it was a hopeless task. Nothing but the warm sun could ever release them, and this became less promising every day. The weather was rapidly changing, and the chill in the night air indicated that winter was not far off.

" It was then that the crew became frightened, and refused to stay longer by the ship. The captain pleaded with them, but they were afraid of drifting around with the iceberg all winter. So finally they rigged up one of the long boats that had not been totally destroyed, and prepared for escape. One day they pulled out from the berg, and rowed around it. The captain even landed on the berg, and, climbing to a high part of it, surveyed the sea through his glass.

" In the distance he could see land. It was the coast of Labrador, with its rocky headlands and great masses of ice-covered peaks. When he saw this, he was satisfied

that the men could row to the shore, and return to the iceberg with assistance. He ordered the men to row hard for the nearest shore, and before night they reached it.

"It was a lonely part of the coast, but, by rowing along the shore for twenty miles, the following morning they reached a small fishing village. There they told their story, and the fishermen agreed to return to the iceberg and help them in the attempt to cut the *Nancy* out of her queer prison. Five fishing smacks and sloops left for the berg. It was not in sight, but the captain of the *Nancy* had taken the latitude and longitude, so that, by making allowances for tide and wind, he could locate it. But all that day and the next, the fishing fleet sailed around where the iceberg should have been, without catching a sight of it.

"The search was kept up for a week. The fleet of ships and smacks separated, and scoured the whole coast for fifty miles in all directions, but no signs of the iceberg or imprisoned ship could be

found. The captain and his men were sorely puzzled. The whole mystery of its disappearance was beyond them. The fishermen in time became sceptical, and began to doubt their stories. Then some began to tell stories of icebergs toppling over and sinking with imprisoned ships; but these tales had little real basis of truth about them. An iceberg will float as long as there is anything left to it, and so also will a wooden ship. Yet what had become of the two?"

Louis stopped and looked toward the distant horizon.

"Well, what had become of them?" demanded the boys, breathlessly.

"I don't know, nor anybody else," was the quiet reply. "It's one of the mysteries of the sea, which no man can explain."

CHAPTER VII

"WE shall strike Labrador in a few days," announced Captain Pendleton one day, as he came out of his cabin and surveyed the horizon. "If everything goes well, we shall make a quick trip, and we'll have some time to hunt around for —"

He stopped in evident confusion; but Louis, standing nearby, said: "Go on, father. We shall go hunting for the lost *Nancy Brown*. I've told them the story."

At first the captain cast a look of reproach at his son, but a moment later he smiled, and replied:

"Yes, we'll go hunting for the *Nancy*. Somehow I can't believe she's actually lost. That iceberg must turn up somewhere."

"How about salvage on her?" asked Frank. "The man who first discovers her should get salvage money, should n't he, captain?"

"Yes, he will get good salvage," was the prompt reply. "I 'll see to that. The *Nancy* was a favorite of mine, and I 'd like to tow her back to New Bedford with flying colors again."

"Wrecked or whole, the salvage is paid?" asked Warren.

Captain Pendleton nodded his head. "Yes, wrecked or whole, I 'll pay the discoverer a good reward. If she has n't been boarded by strangers, I 'll find enough in her cargo to repay me, even if she is a water-logged derelict."

"It seems to me," remarked Harold, "that this question of salvage all depends upon a pair of powerful sea glasses. The one who can see the farthest is bound to discover the *Nancy* and her iceberg first. Now then, captain, if you 'll let me have your glasses, I 'll watch the horizon all the time."

"Send him up forward as watch," said Louis. "Lash him to the masthead, and let him stay there until he finds the *Nancy*."

"We 'll take turns watching, and then

divide the salvage money among us," Frank said. "That 's the fairest way."

Captain Pendleton smiled. "It seems to me that you have all decided that you 'll find the *Nancy* without much trouble."

"We shall find her," said Frank. "I know we shall. That 's what we came up here to do. I know now our mission."

"Well, boys, if confidence counts for anything, you will be successful; but let me warn you, the sea is wide, and the most uncertain and treacherous thing in the world. There are many disappointments on it, and many lucky finds. A man never knows when he will grasp his prize, or when his life's work will be taken from him. I trust you will find the prize rather than the disappointment."

While he talked Warren's eyes had been slowly roving about the distant horizon, and then they came to a sudden stop at a point which might have been in the direction of the coast. Without removing his eyes from the water, he asked, extending a hand:

"Will you lend me your glasses a moment, Captain Pendleton?"

Instantly all eyes were turned on Warren.

"Found the *Nancy* already, Warren?" chaffed Frank.

"No, he sees a porpoise rolling, or a whale spouting," added Harold.

Nevertheless, when Warren clapped the sea glasses to his eyes, and gazed long and attentively toward the horizon, the two boys by his side showed nervous eagerness in watching him.

"What is it, Warren?" Louis asked. "I see something with my naked eye, but I can't make it out."

Warren gasped, and suddenly exclaimed, handing the glasses to Louis: "I think it is the *Nancy*, or some wrecked ship. Look!"

Louis placed the glasses quickly to his eyes, while all the others crowded eagerly around him, including Captain Pendleton, who had become strangely interested in the matter. It seemed an age before Louis dropped the glasses, and, handing them to his father, said:

"What do you make of it, father? I think it 's an iceberg, but it does have a little peculiar appearance."

This conclusion added fuel to the fire, and every boy caught his breath with a little gasp of wonder. Warren felt the blood surge to his head, and he shaded his eyes as he tried to strain them in one long, intent look. Had he really discovered the *Nancy Brown?*

"Yes, it is an iceberg," replied Captain Pendleton, a few moments later, but without further comment. The group of eager watchers were kept waiting full five minutes before the captain spoke again.

"You are right, Louis, it does have a peculiar appearance," he added slowly, and then handed the glasses back to his son.

In a loud voice he called to the man at the wheel to change the course of the schooner, and in a few moments the bow veered around, until she was pointing toward the distant speck on the horizon. To the naked eye the object was illusive. The sun shining on it caused it to change

its shape and size with startling rapidity. When a small cloud passed before the face of the sun, it loomed up in the shadow like a gigantic tower of ice; but at other times it flashed and shifted its form, so that many times it seemed ready to vanish.

The *Northern Star* was bowling along under a twelve-knot breeze, and the iceberg was drifting toward it. This brought the two together rapidly. In a short time every one aboard the schooner could distinctly make out the lines of the drifting iceberg.

It was soon apparent to all that there was something dark and peculiar about one side of the great mass of floating ice. To the boys, unaccustomed to Arctic seas, there was presented a vision of an ice tower which might contain all sorts of peculiar possibilities. To them, the story of the *Nancy Brown*, imprisoned in a floating iceberg, appealed with great force, and not one of them thought that there could be any mistake about their discovery. Here was the *Nancy*, floating down on them in a cake of ice, ready for them to

board and explore to their hearts' content. Warren was even speculating on what he would do with the salvage money.

"I shall claim all of it," he said, strutting up and down the deck. "I did n't agree to your bargain to divide. I made the discovery before Frank made the proposition."

"But silence gives consent," Frank answered, "and you did n't refuse to accept the terms. Come now, Warren, you 'll have to divide up with Harold and Louis and me. If you don't, we 'll run you off the football team when you get back to old Sheffield."

"You can't frighten me that way," Warren returned. "I 'm not to be bluffed by you here on the high seas. You may own the football field and team, but you 're not in it on the high seas. Why, you could n't even see the iceberg when I pointed it out to you. You 'd better have your eyes examined when you get home, Frank."

Louis, who had been staring at the approaching iceberg, suddenly dropped his

glasses, and said: "Don't be too sure of that salvage money, Warren. This is an iceberg, but it may not be the one that ran away with the *Nancy*."

"Why not? What have you found out? Oh, jealous of me! I did n't think that of you, Louis!"

Unmindful of this sally, Louis continued:

"If you 'll look through these glasses, you 'll find that there is something moving on the iceberg."

"What! Somebody alive on it! Did n't all of the sailors leave the *Nancy?* Have they been imprisoned on it all this time?"

"I said something alive was on the iceberg," Louis replied. "I did n't say that it was a man or animal or bird."

If before there was eagerness to study the outlines of the approaching iceberg, it was more than doubled at this announcement, and for some time absolute silence fell on the group as they watched the queer object. As it drew nearer, they could see a dark line stretched irregularly from the base to the summit of the berg. Around the top of it birds were flying,

lighting occasionally on the ice, or disappearing from view on the other side. The dark line was wider and darker in the middle than at either end, and in some places it seemed broad enough to suggest some huge, writhing animal. More than that, it could be seen to move. It wriggled and changed its form and position as they gazed. For all the world it appeared as if the fabled sea-serpent had been located at last, stretching its great black length up the side of the iceberg.

"What can it be?" gasped Warren.

"Certainly not the *Nancy*," replied Louis.

"No, your salvage money has disappeared, Warren," added Frank.

Captain Pendleton walked toward the group, muttering aloud: "That's the queerest sight I ever saw!"

"What do you make out of it?" asked Louis.

Captain Pendleton chuckled softly. "Some of my men are frightened," he said. "They are sure that it is a sea-serpent, or some great creature of the sea,

watching for us. They want me to turn the ship around and sail away."

"But can't you make out anything definite?" persisted Louis, feeling sure that his father had already solved the problem. "What are so many seabirds doing around the top? Why, look, half the body of the creature has disappeared! It's flying away!"

Then Louis began to chuckle. He, too, realized the meaning of the strange illusion; but his companions were still utterly in the dark.

"What is it?" they demanded, breathlessly, in a chorus.

"Nothing but an illusion! You'll see in time!"

"Come, Louis, this suspense is killing. You might tell us now. I'm dying to know!"

Louis took one more look through the glasses at the monster looming up ahead of them, and then said: "That creature has wings, and in a few minutes it will disappear, or at least part of it. You'll find that it is a stranger creature than the

fabled sea-serpent. I believe some of the accounts of the sea-serpent put wings on him, but this monster is even worse than that. It has many wings, and it has the power of flying away in parts. Now if you will watch, the head will fly away, and then, maybe, the tail, and last the body. It can do this without hurting itself in the least. It is a wonderful creature, more wonderful than any you ever read about."

While he spoke, his listeners alternately looked at him and at the iceberg. Several of the sailors who had overheard the remarks showed signs of nervousness. Superstitious to the core of their hearts, they needed only a little verification of their fears to excite them to unknown terror. Louis, glancing around and seeing the sober faces of the sailors, gave vent to a loud peal of laughter.

"Why, can't you see what it is?" he shouted so the men could hear him. "It's nothing but birds, a great colony of Arctic birds lighted on the iceberg. Some of them are jumping up and flying away, and then returning, all the time. That

makes the sea-serpent wriggle and change his form. When we get nearer, they will fly up, and the serpent will vanish entirely."

Thus enlightened, the boys and the superstitious sailors studied the outlines more carefully, and in a few moments every one was convinced of the illusion. As the *Northern Star* approached closer, the birds grew more restless, and flew in denser flocks away from the iceberg. Some flew toward the schooner, and circled around it in huge numbers, flapping their wings with ceaseless and noiseless energy. There must have been thousands — almost millions — of birds on the iceberg. They had lighted on the upper inside of the berg, so that only a portion of them could be seen. Their dark bodies, outlined against the glistening snow and ice of the berg, produced the weird effect of a sea-serpent reposing on the sides and top of the floating mass.

Captain Pendleton was about giving orders to change the course of the ship again, when the boys pleaded for a nearer

view of the strange sea object. He acceded to their request, and gradually the *Northern Star* approached within a quarter of a mile of the mass of floating ice.

By that time the form of the sea-serpent had changed so that it could not in any way be misconstrued as anything but a dense mass of birds sitting on the ice. Thousands of the birds flew up in the air, and made their strange shrieks and cries as they moved toward the ship. They had evidently found a place of refuge and rest on the floating berg which pleased them, and they were resenting the disturbance of others.

"That is a strange sight," Louis said. "I never saw anything like it before. I've seen big colonies on the rocks and promontories, but never out so far from the shore on a floating iceberg."

"Then the *Nancy Brown* is n't in that berg at all?" Warren said rather pathetically.

"No, nor the sea-serpent either. We 'll have to wait for the next one," answered Louis.

"Then it will be my turn to sight it first," said Frank. "Now how about the salvage money, Warren?"

Warren smiled and answered: "Oh, I think I'll agree with the rest of you, that we should divide it!"

Frank merely uttered an exclamation of disgust.

CHAPTER VIII

SEVERAL other icebergs crossed the path of the schooner in the next few days, but none of them had the peculiar appearance of the first one. Some were huge towers of ice pinnacles capped with snow which glistened in the sunlight with wondrous prismatic effects, and others were short floating fields of ice with a few irregular formations in the centre to serve as apologies for icebergs. On some of them particles of driftwood and green moss could be seen, and occasionally colonies of birds would collect to peck at the moss.

To the boys, all of these sights contained something of interest and fascination. Wrenched from their icy fields in the far north, and floated down on the tides of ocean, the bergs were alive with possible romance which no man could fathom. They may have witnessed scenes

in the solitary Arctic seas that the world of science would gladly give anything to interpret.

"Some of them may have come from points farther north than any ship has ever visited," Louis suggested one day, as they hung over the sides of the schooner, watching one float past.

"I should like to land on one," said Frank, with the spirit of romance stirring within him. "It would be worth while to come way up here, if one could go back and say that he had been adrift on an iceberg."

"I don't think you'd want to stay there long," replied Warren. "It must be a pretty cold place to stay."

Louis said suddenly: "We might row out to one. There's no wind this morning, and the schooner is hardly moving at all. I'll see father."

This suggestion was greeted with applause. The three young sailors waited eagerly for the return of Louis. When he appeared again, they knew by his face that he would give them a chance to pick

up some mementos of their strange trip north, from a floating iceberg.

"If you want a good pull at the oars, we can go," he said. "The sea is calm, and there is very little danger."

Half a mile away, becalmed on the still ocean, was a huge field of ice, surmounted, in the middle, by a tall pinnacle. Scattered over its surface were driftwood, moss, and various kinds of loose Arctic plants which had been carried down from their northern home by the loosened pack of ice. Apparently the field of ice did not move half a mile an hour. There was no wind to blow it, and the tides and currents were almost quiet at this point.

"None of the sailors can go with us," Louis said. "They are busy mending sails and tarring the decks, but we ought to be able to manage the small boat. We'll pull four oars, and make a quick trip to the ice field."

Louis was as eager for the adventure as his companions, and he hurriedly stowed away the oars in the boat, and prepared to launch her over the sides of the ship into

the water. While they were working at the boat, Captain Pendleton appeared, and said:

"Don't be gone long, for there are signs of a change in the air. I think we'll have another blow before night. If you hear the fog horn blowing, return at once. I'll watch you myself."

"Ay, ay, sir!" responded Louis, touching his cap.

With the help of the sailors, they were soon launched in their boat, and with steady stroke they pulled her across the water. At old Sheffield they had practised rowing enough to pull a steady and strong oar together, and the boat made gallant speed through the long swells. The sea that had appeared so quiet from the deck of the schooner was not so dull and monotonous now that they were closer to its surface. There was a long swell which made the small boat bob up and down with a little disagreeable motion. On the vessel, this had not been so noticeable.

"I thought there was no sea at all," said Harold, as he looked askance at the waves.

"Does it make you seasick?" asked Louis, from the bow of the boat. "If so, we will go back."

"Oh, no, I'm hardened to that now! I was merely thinking of Frank."

Frank made no answer, but pulled steadily in the bow with Louis, until suddenly his oar seemed to slip, and the crest of a wave was caught in the blade and hurled directly at Harold's head.

"Excuse me, Harold," Frank said. "I was thinking of you, and my thoughts must have influenced my oar."

"I'll return it on the home trip," Harold replied. "We turn about then, and change positions, so that I'll be in the bow."

"Now pull easy," exclaimed Louis, suddenly, interrupting further remarks. "Sometimes the edge of the ice field extends far out in the sea underneath. We don't want to get wrecked on it."

"No," replied Warren. "I'm not seeking that kind of adventure."

"Then go slow, and be ready to obey orders promptly."

Louis stood up in the bow, and, with

an oar ready to guide the boat, should they strike a projecting piece of ice from below, he slowly permitted them to row toward the edge of the field. As they drew nearer, the swells striking the edge of the ice field made a deep roar which resembled breakers on a sandy beach. All along on one side, a line of foam and froth was forming, caused by the swells striking the edge of the ice.

"We won't land on this side," Louis cautioned, "for the waves strike it here, and we might have difficulty in reaching the firm ice, and getting on it safely. We must row around to the other side, where we can get under the lee of the berg."

The other side of the ice field was so sheltered from the waves that the water was perfectly calm. It was a good half mile farther away from the drifting schooner, and the boys laid down to their oars again with a will. Louis set the pace by counting, and Frank, taking his cue from him, took a stroke which the others had hard work to keep up with. The light boat shot sharply and smoothly over the water,

and in a short time they were nearing the edge of the ice field on the leeward side. It was so calm and peaceful here that even Harold felt his timidness dispelled.

"This is glorious!" he said, feeling the exhilarating effects of the row.

The others responded in like expressions, and when they finally rested on their oars, at the command of Louis, they looked around to enjoy the scene. There was apparently no under part of the berg projecting up at any considerable distance from the edge, and the boat was slowly rowed up within ten feet of the edge. Louis plunged his oar down in the water, and announced: "There 's ten feet of water here. I can just strike the bottom of the field with my oar. Now pull slowly."

The floor of the berg shelved up gradually, from ten feet to five, four, three, and two. When the nose of the boat crunched into the ice, they could see the bottom two feet below them. Instantly every oarsman started to his feet, and made preparations to jump on the ice cake.

"Here! Here! Get down there!"

shouted Louis. "What sort of discipline is this? Stand by your oars until told to ship them."

"We're not on ship now," protested Frank; "and we can do as we like."

"You are under my command, and, if you don't obey, I'll return to the ship and have you courtmartialed."

Then, before any one of the crew could reply, Louis took his oar, and brought it down with a resounding whack on the ice edge.

"See there!" he shouted. "If you had jumped on that ice, you might have been lost. It's as weak as snow crust here. The salt water has honeycombed it so that it is ready to fall apart. We'll have to push along the edge until we find solid ice."

The boys returned to their seats with a little crestfallen air. They realized how near to peril they had been without once dreaming of it.

"I guess we'll stand by Louis's orders hereafter," Warren said.

"You'll be wise if you do," Frank added.

"I 'm not going to think that I know it all any more up here in this strange sea. Everything is so different from where I 've ever been before."

When they reached another point which Louis thought worth sounding, they waited patiently for him to give the order to ship their oars. With heads turned, but oars in position, they sat ready for the word of command. As before, Louis tested the depth of the water, and then the strength of the ice, both underneath the boat and on the outside edge of the field. This time, the oar did not break brittle snow ice, but it resisted the blow of the oar with a sharp, ringing sound.

"This is all right!" Louis shouted. "Now we 'll anchor here and land."

Leading the way over the side of the boat, he pulled the anchor with him, and fastened it in the ice at the end of a five-fathom painter. The boys tumbled out of the boat after him, and there stood, a little group of Arctic explorers, adrift on a great field of ice. On all sides was ice, or the blue of the sea. A mile away was the

Northern Star, with her sails flapping in the idle wind, and overhead the few northern seabirds were soaring with noiseless motion.

"This is like exploring for the North Pole," exclaimed Frank. "If we only had a few pack dogs and a sled, we'd take an Arctic ride over the ice."

"I think we'll have to hurry up in our explorations of this field of ice, and leave the imaginary North Pole for another day," suggested Louis, scanning the horizon with the eye of a sailor. "We're going to get more wind soon, and father will be blowing the horn for us to return. Come, now, I want to reach that high mass of ice in the middle, and plant my hat on the highest point."

"We'll have a race for it!" replied Frank, eager for any kind of sport or competition.

In another moment they were scampering across the field of ice in a close bunch, as they had many times before raced across the athletic field of the Sheffield School. It was a close race to the edge of the rising

mass of ice. Then they began to slip and slide, so that they clung to one another to retain their footing. Great masses of ice had been piled upon each other, forced there by giant waves, and some crushing power of wind and currents of the ocean. These had been wedged in and frozen in a solid cake. Above these towered other huge masses. The power of the elements to compact such enormous pieces of ice, one upon another, until a veritable mountain had been formed, was manifested on all sides. It was like climbing huge rocks, which led to a mountain peak, to reach the summit of the iceberg in the centre. Snow had accumulated in dense masses in places, and the boys sunk waist-deep at times in this soft snow.

Gradually, however, they neared the summit, which was fifty feet above the surface of the ice field, and soft and brittle where the sun had come in contact with it for many days. They worked their way along cautiously, kicking at the columns and cakes ahead, to see if they would hold.

Finally, on the very summit of the berg,

they stood, with the sea and ice field clearly visible on every side. A cheer escaped their lips, and, with four hats waving frantically in the air, they looked toward the ship, to attract the attention of the crew. It was an achievement for them that was well worth the endeavor. From the deck of the *Northern Star* Captain Pendleton watched them through his sea glasses with a little anxious look on his face.

"There now, they have reached it," he exclaimed, "and they will be satisfied. Blow the fog horn, Ned, for I don't like the looks of the weather. We must get them back to the ship at once."

"Ay, ay, sir, it is time, I think."

"Yes, time," replied the captain. Then, musing to himself, he added:

"But I had n't the heart to deny them, although it was a little risky. I hope nothing will happen before they get back."

CHAPTER IX

THE weather was uncertain enough to alarm Louis before the fog horn sounded its strident call across the sea. In the midst of their hilarity, he glanced apprehensively at the western sky, and immediately concluded that it was time for them to make the return trip. Just then he heard the dismal echoes of the horn, which only confirmed his fears.

"Now we must race back to the boat," he said, hoping to hurry his companions without alarming them.

"Oh, no, I don't want to race back!" said Frank. "I'll probably never see an ice floe at such close range again, and I'm in no hurry to leave it."

"But the horn is calling us, and we must obey like sailors," replied Louis, starting on a dog-trot across the ice.

"We haven't collected any mementos of our trip yet," interposed Warren, stop-

ping to examine some pieces of driftwood imbedded in the ice.

They were evidently not anxious to hurry, and Louis bit his lip with a little expression of anxiety. He looked over his shoulder to catch another glimpse of the western sky. The storm of wind was coming up rapidly. He had his doubts now whether they could reach the schooner in time. He stood irresolute a moment, and then, hearing the sharp blasts of the horn again, he said quickly:

"Come, there 's no time to linger. I 'm going back to the ship, and those who stay behind will get left."

He turned resolutely around and trotted toward the boat. Not once did he turn his head. There was no patter of feet behind him, but he was confident that, if he persisted in his race, the others would soon follow.

Imagine his surprise when he reached the edge of the floe, where the boat was anchored, to find that he stood alone. The others were far behind, collecting and examining various articles that had drifted

down with the ice floe. They were a quarter of a mile away, and paying no attention to him.

The sharp blast of the fog horn fell apparently upon deaf ears. The boys were too eager in their researches to heed it. For once the flush of anger surged up in the face of Louis. They had deliberately refused to obey his wishes and commands. For such an offence any member of the football team at old Sheffield would have been unceremoniously turned down by Frank. Was it not more important up here, in the lonely, dangerous Arctic regions, for every one to obey orders of the leader?

Had Louis not been impressed by the peril approaching, he would have rowed back to the *Northern Star* alone, and left his companions on the ice floe until they appealed for help. It was what they deserved; but, under the circumstances, he did not care to take the risk. Indeed, it was an appalling danger that threatened, and every minute counted as precious. Raising his voice he shouted wildly to

them, pointing to the darkened western sky. A glance at the heavens, more than his voice, made them suddenly desist in their aimless search for relics, and, with a startled cry of alarm, they sprinted toward the long boat.

But in their hurry Frank slipped on the ice, slid along it for a few feet, and then lay quite still. Harold and Warren stopped to help him. With difficulty they got him on his feet again, and then, with the boys supporting him, he limped slowly along.

Meanwhile the clouds had overcast the heavens on all sides, and the booming of thunder startled the quietness of the ocean. The vivid lightning flashed and rent the clouds asunder, while great drops of rain spattered down upon them.

The fear of danger now seized the boys, and they made all the speed possible to reach the side of Louis. Frank, pale and suffering from his sprained ankle, was the most anxious of the trio to reach the boat. One glance out upon the dark, frowning sea made him shudder. When they finally

reached the boat, Louis stood by its side calmly surveying them.

"What is it; another of those fearful storms?" one of the boys gasped.

"Yes, and you 're going to be caught in it, just because of your refusal to obey orders."

"But we did n't know there was any danger," Harold apologized.

"No, but you knew that I was in command of this expedition, and I gave the order to hurry to the boat," replied Louis, sternly. "You saw fit to do as you pleased. Now you 'll have to take the consequences."

"But we did n't know," pleaded Frank.

The eyes of Louis flashed. He turned upon the captain of the old football team, and replied sharply:

"You should have been the first to obey, Frank. You make us obey orders when playing on the team, and you should set an example now in discipline."

"But I —"

Warren interrupted Frank's attempt at an excuse, by jumping into the boat, and

saying: "Don't stop to quarrel now. We're losing time."

Louis turned fiercely upon him.

"Get out of that boat!" he said harshly.

"What for?" demanded Warren, sullenly.

"I'll give you ten seconds to obey, or I'll drop you in the water!"

There was no mistaking their leader's anger and determination. He was physically superior to any of them, and when he stood with blazing eyes and clenched hands ready to carry out his threat, Warren obeyed.

"I don't know what for," he grumbled.

"No, but your first duty is to obey, and then you may find out later," Louis answered in a less insistent voice. "I want you all to understand in the future, that when I'm in command, I shall be obeyed promptly, and without excuse or question. You can see what your disobedience to orders is going to cost you now."

"Is there any danger?" Warren asked.

"If so, why not hurry back to the ship? Time is precious."

"No, it is n't now. It was when I gave the order to retreat. Now you can all sit down on the ice and take all the time you need to collect specimens."

"But why don't we return to the ship?"

"Because we can't. It 's too late. Our boat would be swamped in this sea and wind in five minutes."

The three boys stared at one another in perplexity and fear. "What can we do, then?" they asked in dismal voices.

"We must stay on the ice floe until the storm has passed," Louis replied grimly. "It 's our only hope. If the wind and waves don't break the ice in pieces, we may come out all right."

This information was not received with pleasure. The ice floe suddenly lost its fascination for the boys. It was well enough to play on it in pleasant weather, but to be cast adrift on it in a storm was quite another story. The darkening sky had already nearly shut from their view

the *Northern Star*, and they glanced in the direction of the vanishing ship with longing eyes. But to Louis there was something more than fear and longing; he wondered if his father would suffer greater agony than they at the separation. If anything happened to them, Captain Pendleton would never forgive himself.

The sails of the schooner were now blowing heavily in the gale, and the ship was working slowly toward the ice floe. This, in view of the storm, was a dangerous move. Louis realized this, and wanted to signal to his father not to approach nearer. A collision in the darkness with the big ice floe would wreck the *Northern Star*, so that all lives would be lost.

Then it occurred to Louis that his father was watching for him to launch the small boat, so that the schooner could stand by and pick them up. To relieve him of any such fear, Louis suddenly decided that their safety depended upon clinging to the ice floe, and retaining their small boat intact.

If his father could be made to realize this, he would stand off from the floe until the storm was over, and then return and pick them up. Conscious that his father was watching them closely through his sea glasses, Louis sprang toward the boat, and shouted:

"All hands help me to drag the boat on the ice! We must save her anyway! Now together!"

This time there was no tendency to ignore his orders. Every boy took his position by the side of the boat, and with a strong pull they lifted it from the water to the ice.

"Pull her back as far as we can," Louis added. "There will be a heavy sea on, and the waves may wash fifty feet over the edge of the ice."

As if to confirm his words, the wind lashed the sea into a wild fury, and the waves broke with a resounding roar against the edge of the ice floe. The wind howled and shrieked, while the darkness increased so that the *Northern Star* slowly vanished from view; but the last sight Louis caught

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of her, she was heading away from the ice. Captain Pendleton had evidently understood the sudden move of the boys, and he tacitly took the hint and sailed out of the zone of danger.

But with the total disappearance of the ship, a new fear seemed to possess the castaways. Each one shuddered, but not a word was spoken. The heavy thunder of the storm made the scene wild and painful, while the lightning flashes failed to reveal the presence of the *Northern Star.* In vain they waited for each successive flash to catch a glimpse of the ship. She was nowhere to be seen, and the great boundless ocean appeared as deserted and lonely as if a ship had never been launched on it.

The storm proved a veritable hurricane and cyclone, sweeping down upon the defenceless heads of the boys as if it would destroy them at one fell swoop. The waves rose higher and higher in their fury, and swept upon the surface of the ice floe with terrible earnestness. Fortunately the boys were on the lee side of the floe, and the

worst of the breakers were far from them. The roar of the waves breaking on the opposite side of the big floe sounded like the booming of heavy artillery, and it could easily be heard above the shriek of the wind.

Great blinding drops of rain poured from the clouds, deluging the frightened castaways as if buckets of water had been dropped over them. Louis had them turn the boat bottom up, and they crawled under this for shelter. For a time, this protection relieved them of a part of the discomfort. But the waves, dashing higher and higher over the ice, soon flung their spray over the boat.

Louis crawled from under the boat and shouted: "We must move farther back. Come now, all hands at the boat again!"

Toilsomely they dragged and pushed the boat farther up on the ice floe until the pursuing waves were left in the rear. Then, breathing hard from their violent exertions, they once more crawled under its shelter and waited for the storm to pass. Louis, however, was less satisfied than his

companions. He knew more of the work of destruction of the summer storms, and he understood how frail was the support on which they rested.

He listened intently to the noises around, applying his ear to the cold ice underneath them, as if to catch some new faint sound in the distance. The others did not know what he was listening for. Their position was miserable enough without anticipating any greater danger or discomfort. When Louis finally crawled from under the boat, he appeared calm and undisturbed, but he was far from contented and satisfied. He walked away toward the line of breakers, and was gone for some moments. In the darkness his disappearance added terror to the minds of the boys, and they shouted for him to return.

"Don't leave us, Louis," Frank exclaimed, as their leader's form appeared again. "Why don't you stay here and wait?"

If they could have seen his pale, drawn face in the darkness, they would have understood something of his thoughts

and actions. He kneeled down where the boys were crouching, and said:

"Frank, the ice floe is breaking up, and we are in great danger! It may go to pieces any moment!"

CHAPTER X

THIS announcement sent a thrill through the three that, for a moment, held them dumb with amazement and surprise. It was Louis who spoke again, trying hard not to express in his voice the fear that clutched at his heart. Not until then had he entirely despaired of weathering the storm on the ice floe, especially if they could retain intact their boat in which to escape when the storm had subsided. But his visit to the sides of the ice floe showed him that their insecure resting place was rapidly going to pieces. The waves were crumbling the rotten ice into powder, and breaking off huge cakes which floated away on the sea as toys for the sea.

Rapidly the encroachment of the waves was dividing the floe into a dozen pieces, and unless they were fortunate enough to

remain on the largest cake, they would inevitably be washed into the sea.

"We must get up and move," Louis continued. "I hardly know what to do. It is so dark that I cannot see where the waves have cut through the ice. I know they are close to us on this side, and also over on that side. They may have already cut us off on the other two sides."

"Then there is no hope for us?" gasped Harold, in anguish. "Won't our boat live in this sea?"

"Not a minute," Louis replied; "and yet we must n't desert the boat. We must drag that with us. It may be that, if we can reach the higher ice of the berg, we shall be saved. I see no other way out of our trouble."

"Then let us hurry away."

"Yes, but which way is the berg? I 'm turned around, and the waves appear to surround us."

They stopped in amazement to see if they could measure the distance to the berg and distinguish the different points of the compass. Huddled together in the

drenching rain, they waited until Louis spoke again.

"We must move at any rate!" he said. "We'll go in this direction. I don't hear breakers off there!"

Dragging the heavy boat through the wind and rain was no small feat, and they toiled at their task until their hands were swollen. But the fear of their impending fate kept them at their task. They forgot their own pain and weariness of limbs. For half an hour they pulled the boat across the ice, and they were soon congratulating themselves on their security. Suddenly, at their very feet, there was a loud booming noise, like the crackling of a heavy gun. The ice beneath them appeared to open, and, from the crack thus formed, the water rushed and gurgled up with a loud hissing noise. Louis, standing at the bow of the boat, caught the first rush of the water, and flung up his hands with a cry of warning.

Then the waves overcame him, and swept him past the group. As he disappeared in the water, Warren, Frank, and

Harold saved themselves by jumping in the lifeboat, which, caught on the huge swell of water, was carried fifty feet along and thrown violently over on its side. The three boys were thrown out of the boat, but, instead of landing in the sea, they fell on the ice.

Picking themselves up and clutching the boat with both hands, they tried to clear their eyes and mouths of water. When they could speak again, Frank gasped: "Where is Louis? Is he lost?"

There was no response from Louis, and a groan escaped the lips of the three survivors. With the loss of their leader, what prospect had they of escaping? All around the battling of the storm and waves continued with unabated fury, and the breakers roared nearer and nearer to them. Their frail boat seemed like a puny cockleshell before the wild fury of such a sea. Yet they clung to it on the ice, as their last refuge.

Temporarily they were out of all danger, for the cracking ice did not extend to where they were grouped, and beneath their

feet it was firm and solid. The surging waters which had cast them up had likewise receded, and were now washing and breaking against the edges of the two parted floes. Even in the darkness the boys could see that half of their floe had been cut adrift and their home much narrowed. Behind them the solid ice extended for some distance, but they were not sure whether they were on the floe which connected with the thicker ice of the berg, or on a floating fragment.

"We must move away from here," Frank finally exclaimed, as the roaring breakers appeared to come nearer. "We must reach the higher ice, or we 'll be washed away yet."

"But not without Louis," replied Warren. "We surely must look for him. How can we get along without him?"

The other two shuddered at the words, for they were as conscious of their great loss as was Warren. They were indeed helpless shipwrecks without their leader. For some time they remained silent, clinging to their boat, and listening to the roar

of the storm and sea. Then a huge wave dashed up over the smooth ice and nearly lifted them off their feet. This immediately brought them to their senses, and simultaneously they sprang up and began pulling the lifeboat farther upon the ice.

Farther and farther from the breakers they crawled, not knowing whither they were going, and scarcely conscious of the lurking dangers all around. The sharp cracking of the ice at intervals boomed far above the wind and rain, and each time the boys stopped and trembled with fear. They knew not whether the next break would develop at their very feet, or a quarter of a mile away.

"Poor Louis," Frank sobbed more than once.

"What will Captain Pendleton say?" Warren added.

"He'll think we deserted him," Harold said sadly. "But there was nothing we could do."

Onward they trudged, finding the ice firmer as they proceeded, until Frank suddenly shouted: "This is the right

direction! The ice is firmer and higher here, and I think I can see the top of the berg ahead."

Through the mists of the night and storm-clouds a white vision did appear at intervals. With eyes fastened on it, the three hurried forward as fast as their heavy burden would permit. The boat was growing heavier to drag at every rod, and they were by this time all panting with their exertions.

When they reached a point a hundred yards back from the breakers, they felt quite secure, and once more seated themselves on the ice, under the overturned boat. For some time they lay there, protected from the wind and sleet, silently listening to the howling of the wind and the distant moaning of the sea.

"We never expected this when we started on our vacation," remarked Harold, with an attempt to appear as lighthearted as the circumstances permitted.

"If we ever get out of it, I think we 'll have something to remember as long as we live," Warren rejoined.

"Did you ever hear or read of sailors cast away on a cake of ice with a boat as a protection, and no food or drink to save them from starvation?" asked Frank.

"It's worse than Robinson Crusoe's adventure. He had an island that wouldn't melt or drift away."

"I don't know. We may go in search of help, while Robinson had to wait for ships to come to him."

"And icebergs always have the knack of floating in the path of vessels," added Warren.

"But ours may prove the exception to the rule, and stay up here forever."

"Or melt in this storm. I never saw so much rain."

Outside it was beating down upon the boat with a wild tattoo. Occasionally icy sleet and hailstones would rain down with the wind, and create a noise that suggested the patter of many feet.

"If we only had a light, we might be more comfortable," suggested one of the castaways, mournfully.

"Or something to eat. I'm terribly

hungry! I did n't notice it when we were working, but now I feel so hollow that I think I 'm ready to collapse."

The storm was subsiding a trifle, but the thunder continued to roll in the distance, with occasional flashes of lightning. The boys drew as much comfort out of their position as possible. They were so thankful that they had been delivered from the death which had claimed Louis, that other things appeared less distressing to them.

Finally, when the storm showed distinct signs of breaking and passing away, they stretched their cramped wet limbs and prepared to emerge from their place of refuge. Frank had ducked his head under one end of the boat, when a loud crack startled him. It was as if a heavy object had fallen from the clouds with the rain. It struck the top of the boat repeatedly.

At first the boys thought of the cracking ice, and wondered if their island had once more been cut in two by the sea. Then, as it rattled against the top of

their boat directly over their heads, they knew that it was not the ice breaking up. The uncanniness of the noise startled them. The thought of Robinson Crusoe and his savages flashed through their minds. Was their island of ice also inhabited? Were there people on it, or more likely polar bears?

Every one held his breath; the noise was repeated, but more faintly. This time it had the distinct sound of somebody rapping the top of the boat with a heavy object. Then a moan reached their ears. This at first mystified them.

Frank was the first to recover his self-possession. What human being could be on the ice except Louis? With a sudden jump, he crawled from under the boat. Once outside he could see the dark form of a prostrate man back of the boat, with one hand reaching out to touch it with a piece of driftwood. Frank sprang to the man's side and said:

"Louis! Louis! Is that you?"

These words brought Warren and Harold from under cover, and the three bent

over the figure stretched out on the ice. In the upturned face they quickly recognized their lost companion, but the eyes were closed, and the face drawn and pale.

CHAPTER XI

IN the extreme darkness it was difficult to tell whether Louis was dead or not. Frank, kneeling on the ice, tried to catch a faint beat of his heart, but the noise of the storm made this impossible. So far as they could judge, life was extinct, and only the corpse of their friend had been washed up to them, in this strange manner. There was little hope of resuscitating him, if he were still alive, for they had no medicines or dry warm clothes to help nature in her fight against death. With tender hands they lifted him from the ice and carried him under their overturned boat, where the rain could not beat upon the white face. Once under shelter, Frank said: "We must rub his hands and feet until he moves. That's all we can do at present."

Under the friction of their hands, a faint warmth seemed to glow in the body, and

within ten minutes the boys were overjoyed at a slight sigh which escaped the lips.

"He's alive! He's alive!" shouted Warren, who first detected the faint breathing.

With renewed energy they applied themselves to the task of restoring Louis to life and consciousness. They rubbed the limbs and body with more vigor, and even placed their own damp coats over his shoulders to increase the protection from the cold.

Slowly their efforts were rewarded. Louis sighed again, and then moved an arm gently. In time his eyelids fluttered, and for a brief instant they opened. After that the boys knew that he was still in a position to make a brave fight for life. If they only had a fire to dry his clothes, or to warm the space under the boat, they would have found their task easier. But there was no time to worry over the impossible. The need of action was great, and each castaway felt that the responsibility rested heavily upon

his shoulders. For some time the angry storm outside lost its terrors for them. The sea, roaring and rolling in the distance, seemed more like the echo of a dream. Even when the ice near them cracked with an ominous sound, they were only temporarily alarmed.

A full half hour elapsed before Louis finally opened his eyes, stared through the darkness, and tried to collect his thoughts. When he smiled, a faint recollection of his position, and the events which had led up to it, possessed him.

"I must have fainted," he murmured. "I rapped on the boat, but I could n't speak. Then I grew dizzy, and I lost control of everything."

"You gave us an awful fright, Louis," Frank said in a voice that trembled a little. "We thought you were dead, and — and now we 're so glad that you 're not."

"I thought so myself for a time," Louis replied. "When that wave took me away, I thought I 'd seen my last of you. I don't see how you were all saved from it."

"It washed us upon the ice, and flung

us like driftwood out of the surf," Harold responded. "I was never handled so roughly in my life!"

"But the boat — how did you save that?" Louis asked.

"The boat was tossed up with us," Warren replied. "Then we clung to it, and it has saved our lives once since."

"But how were you saved?" Frank interrupted. "We want to hear your story."

Louis raised his head on an elbow, and continued:

"There is n't much to tell. I was flung around in the water, and carried out into the open sea. I don't know just how it all happened, it was done so quickly. I found myself battling with big cakes of ice and waves. One moment I would find myself floating on a big cake of ice, and then I would be knocked off, and had to swim. I must have fought around for ten minutes in this way, getting bruises all over me, and then I remember saying to myself, that I could n't keep it up any longer. I was so weak that I was ready to

give up. Just then a big wave caught me and carried me along on its crest as if I had been a piece of cork. I gave up battling then. I felt that my time had come. I knew I would have to go where the wave took me.

"When it finally dropped me, I thought the world had come to an end. My whole body was bruised and cut by a blow that, for a time, made me unconscious. When I recovered, I found I was lying on the ice again. The last wave had thrown me so far upon the ice that the others could not reach me. Then I crawled along until I found your boat turned upside down. I did n't know whether I should have strength enough to reach it or not. At first I thought it was alone, and that all of you had been lost. Then I heard a noise inside, and Frank's voice reached my ear. I think the joy of finding some of you alive made me faint, as much as my weakness and bruises. At any rate I 've heard that sudden joy will sometimes overcome one quicker than bad news."

"Then we should all be overcome,"

replied Harold, with a whimsical smile. "I don't think anything better could happen to us than to find you, Louis."

The boy looked up with a grateful expression in his eyes, but he answered: "Nothing, probably, than to find a way to get safely back to the *Northern Star*. I wonder where she is now!"

There was complete silence in the group. Huddled together under the boat, their minds rushed back in remembrance to the schooner, which at that very moment was battling with the elements for its very existence. None knew better than Louis how fierce was the storm and raging sea; but, whether he feared for the safety of his father or not, he did not express his troubled thoughts in words. Instead, he turned his attention to their immediate needs. They were certainly far from out of danger. Even though the storm should subside, and their field of ice prove large enough to hold them for weeks and months, the prospect of suffering for lack of food and water was not very comforting. After such a storm the sea would not calm

down very quickly, and it might be days before it would be safe for them to launch the boat.

Suddenly, while they were listening and thinking of the past, Frank put a hand out from under the shelter of the boat, and exclaimed:

"The storm is passing away. It's only raining a little bit."

Louis roused himself from his sad reflections, and said:

"Then we must turn over our boat, and catch some drinking water."

"I think we've had water enough to last us for a time, both fresh and salt," responded Frank.

"Not if the storm passes. You'll soon find that the worst thing that can happen to a shipwrecked sailor is to get out of water. We have nothing else to catch the rain-water in, so we must turn the boat over."

There was no intention to question the wisdom of Louis's remarks, but Frank could not refrain from adding: "But you'll get wet again, and you're weak."

"I'm all right now. I was weak and bruised. Turn the boat over, and catch some water before it is too late."

While Louis sat up on the ice, the others, with a hard pull together, turned the boat over. The rain had indeed by this time nearly stopped, and Louis became anxious lest they were too late to catch any of it. He had once heard his father describe the awful agony of being without water, when cast adrift on the sea, and the mere remembrance of it made him thirsty now, despite the wet condition of his clothes and body.

But there were fitful gusts of wind, blowing out of the scudding clouds, which dropped good showers of water down upon them. As the clouds parted, and the rain ceased to fall, the light slowly brightened up their surroundings. As the returning dawn widened the horizon of their view, the boys watched with keen interest the position they had accidentally taken on the ice. At first the ice and sea and clouds all seemed to merge into one dim, foggy blanket, and they were

unable to find any line separating them. But gradually the line of the sea grew more distinct. They could see then the size of their prison. They were only a short distance from the highest part of the ice floe, and on all sides the surf of the sea was breaking.

Altogether, their strange floating island was half a mile across in one direction, and scarcely a third in another. The edges were weakened by the pounding waves, so that, while they looked, pieces of ice broke off and floated away. The thickness of the ice in the centre had evidently been their safety. The berg towered some thirty to fifty feet above the water, and, from this pinnacle, the ice sloped gradually to the water. To Louis, the iceberg appeared to lean on one side, as if ready to topple over.

"When this ice around us crumbles away," he said, pointing to the berg, "the whole thing will topple over. We must get off before that happens. The sea and rain have completely ruined and weakened the whole floe."

"How soon will the berg topple over, do you think?" asked Warren, anxiously.

"Probably in a day or two, or it may stay just as it is now for a week. It all depends upon the wind and waves."

They were really camped on the ice at a dangerous point, and, after the light was strong and steady enough to enable them to study their surroundings intelligently, Louis proposed that they move more toward the centre. With a few gallons of fresh water collected in the bottom of their boat, but with no food whatever, they once more started to shove their boat farther away from the line of the breakers.

When at a safe distance, Louis walked with the others to the summit of the iceberg, climbing up the slippery sides until they had a fair view of the ocean on every side. Each one hoped and expected to catch a glimpse of the *Northern Star*, but not one of the castaways expressed his thoughts. Silently they stood on their high perch and scanned the horizon with its wide line of foam and froth.

Louis sighed, and said: "I don't see

any signs of the *Northern Star.* She must have been blown far out of her course."

"Will Captain Pendleton ever be able to find us?"

"He will do his best, but we must not wait for him. We must try to look out for ourselves."

"Yes," assented Frank, doubtfully. "But what can we do?"

Louis tried to laugh, as he asked: "What would you do, Frank, if your foot-ball team was going to pieces before a better team?"

"I'd pull the fellows together, and try some new trick to save the day."

"Exactly, and that's what we must do. We must pull ourselves together, and try to find some trick that will save us. First, then, we must have drink and food. We have the first, but the latter we must get."

"Well, what can we do to get that? We're worse off than Robinson Crusoe. Our island has n't even trees and grass, absolutely nothing but ice."

"True, and we can't live on ice alone."

"Rather thin diet," suggested Harold, with a grimace. "It might do on a hot day; but I'm too cold now to suit me. My feet have had ice enough under them to last me the rest of my life."

CHAPTER XII

THE problem of securing food pressed with increasing force upon the boys. It had been a long time since they had eaten, and they felt hungry and weak from their prolonged abstinence. The value of their rain-water was soon manifest to them, for, with the pangs of hunger increasing, they felt the necessity of drinking more and oftener than usual. Louis had taken an iron nail from the boat, and he bent this in the shape of a hook, but he had no bait, and his fishing experiences were not very satisfactory.

"Do you think we'll eat uncooked fish?" asked Frank.

"You will soon be thankful to get anything," Louis replied.

This prediction was soon verified. Even Frank confessed that he was hungry enough to eat a raw fish, if he had one;

but at the expiration of several hours they were no nearer food than before.

Matters were hourly growing so serious that Louis finally threw down his hook, and exclaimed: "We must launch our boat, and try to reach the shore. We 'll starve here!"

"But how far off is the coast?"

"I don't know. It may be fifty or a hundred miles."

"Which direction is it in?"

"I don't know that," replied Louis, a little irritably. "How can I tell without a compass?"

"Then don't you think we 're safer right here?"

"No, I don't. We can move around in a boat. Here we can only stand still and wait, and I never found anything come to me yet by waiting. I 'm going to hunt for the shore, or die in the attempt."

There was a feeble chorus of assents to this; but somehow the thought of embarking in their frail boat, in such a sea, had no attraction for them.

"It will soon be night," Frank added,

looking around at the horizon. "Should n't we wait until morning before we leave?"

Louis turned abruptly and walked toward the highest part of the ice floe. "I must look around again," he muttered. "The *Northern Star* can't be far off."

Gloomily he stood on the top of the iceberg, looking around the sea, hoping that some object would appear that could be made to resemble a ship. Then suddenly, as his eyes roamed around, he gave a smothered exclamation.

"What is it?" one of his companions asked.

"There! Over there! It 's the coast!" he shouted excitedly.

"I don't see anything but a cloud," replied Frank.

"No; but it 's the coast line. Quick, we must leave at once and reach it before dark!"

Frank started to make some further excuse; but remembering past experiences, he suddenly stopped and turned to hurry toward the boat with the rest. The oars were gone, and for a moment the problem

of propelling the boat through the sea seemed without a solution. Not even Louis had thought of the oars, and his face had a blank expression on it.

"We can't make the shore without oars," Warren said.

"Yes, we can," sharply answered Louis, showing by his decision that he had arrived at a plan of action. He turned his head an instant, and held up a hand.

"The wind is blowing in the right direction. We can sail there."

"But where can we get the sails?"

"Rip up this plank!" commanded Louis, indicating one of the long narrow planks laid inside of the boat. Four pairs of strong hands soon pulled the narrow plank from its position. Then Louis fastened it in the bow of the boat with a few nails loosened from it. In this position it formed a slender, uncertain mast; but to Louis it appeared as satisfactory as if made in some shipyard for the boat.

"Now you 'll have to strip off your coats," he said. "I 'll use mine first."

With the four coats spread out on the

ice, Louis proceeded to tie them together by their sleeves until he had a considerable sail area.

"Not a very handsome sail," he remarked, "and one that you could n't use going against the wind, but I think it will carry us."

The sail was not to be hoisted until the boat was launched in the water, free from the ice. They folded it carefully and placed it in the bow of the boat, near the slender mast.

"We need a rudder next," Louis said, looking around for another plank which would suit his purpose. Near the stern there was a short thick board which served little purpose in holding the boat together. This was next torn from its position with difficulty.

"Now we 're ready for the launching," announced the leader of the castaways.

They shoved the boat across the ice toward the lee side, where the waves were slight. When they approached the edge, every boy stood ready to jump in the boat, should the ice crack and give way beneath

their weight. But, fortunately, the ice had been worn little at this point, and they were enabled to push the bow of the boat into the sea, before the ominous noise of cracking ice greeted their ears.

"Now jump aboard!" shouted Louis, as the sharp boom of the breaking ice sounded on the air. "Shove her hard, and jump!"

Two on a side, they pushed the boat out into the sea, and then struggled free of the waves, as she floated in the clear water. The force of the push carried the boat a dozen feet from the ice floe, and the wind quickly increased the distance. It was now impossible, without oars, to return to the floe. They were drifting before the wind, and nothing they could do would serve to alter their course.

Louis handed Harold the top of the sail, and, with Frank and Warren on either side, they managed to adjust the four coats in such a way that the wind blew them out in one single sail. They had no string or rope, and two of the castaways held the lower part of the sail, while the third

watched to see that none of the knots loosened. Louis seated himself in the stern, and, with his improvised rudder thrown overboard, he managed to steer his craft in the direction of the land.

The land was still nothing but a dark, cloudy effect in the distance. It more than once deceived even Louis, making him feel that he had been mistaken, after all. The rapid approach of night added to his anxiety. The boat was scudding along rapidly, for the wind was blowing a good gale, and the sail was proving a great success.

Finally, Louis caught his first certain glimmering of the coast. The jagged outline of a headland became so plain that there could be no mistake. Standing up in the stern of the boat, he communicated his discovery to the rest.

"It 's land!" he shouted. "It 's land!"

"So you said before," Frank replied.

"Yes, but I was n't so sure of it then. Now I know."

"Then you brought us out here on an uncertainty?"

"Not exactly," laughed Louis; "but on a strong probability. Every one is liable to make a mistake."

The wind freshened a little, and the sail drew the bow of the boat down in the water, so that it seemed at times as if they would have to shorten sail; but Louis was so anxious to reach land before night should envelop them, that he would not think of it.

"It 's a rocky coast," he explained. "I can see the breakers now, and we may have to swim for it."

"We 'll be wrecked in the surf?" asked Warren, anxiously.

"We must cling to the boat, whatever we do," Louis responded. "The waves will carry the boat upon the beach, even if it does n't us. She is very light."

The prospect ahead was not alluring. The nearer they sailed toward the shore, the more grim and hard its rocky outlines appeared, while at its base roared the surf. The wind was blowing the waves toward the shore, and by the time they reached the rocks they were running high. No

boat could approach such a coast without being wrecked and pounded to pieces; yet there was no other course for the boys. They had to steer the craft to absolutely known danger, and wreck her upon one of the most forbidding coasts of the North American continent. Above the line of sea-coast and rocks they could see the trees waving, with their foliage green and inviting to the eyes, and every boy longed, with all his heart, to be up there, beyond the reach of the turbulent sea.

As far as the eye could see, the breakers were dashing upon a line of sharp headlands and rough beach strewn with rocks. In some places the rocks rose directly from the water to a height of several hundred feet. Against this granite base, the waves tumbled with a mighty roar which echoed far out to sea. The foam dashed high against the cliffs, forming picturesque flash-light scenes, which changed and shifted with each motion of the restless sea.

Louis stood up in the stern of his boat, scanning the line of coast eagerly and

anxiously. In vain he looked for some loophole of escape, but nowhere was the line of rocks broken. The sea simply climbed over small and large rocks to reach the beach beyond. The wind was driving them swiftly upon the rocks, and the chances were that the boat would be dashed to pieces in the first encounter.

"I don't like this," said Frank, firmly. "I 'd rather be on the ice floe. There 's nothing but certain death ahead."

Warren and Harold shook their heads. They, too, dreaded the wrecking of their craft. Only Louis remained firm and determined.

"It 's too late now," he replied. "We could n't go back if we wanted to, but we don't. Every one of you prepare to swim and get ashore when we strike."

They were now approaching so close to the rocks that their dark heads, shaggy with moss and seaweed, appeared like monster sea-lions staring up from the ocean's depth at them.

"Tell us when we 're going to strike!" shouted Warren, making his voice heard

with difficulty above the fearful roar of the surf.

"I 'm not going to strike until there 's no hope," replied Louis. "It will be a hidden rock I 'll strike, and you can see that before I can."

Then followed a skilful battling with the tide, waves, and wind. The boat rushed among the outer lines of rocks visible to the naked eye. They were standing in deep water, but no one could tell where other rocks, a few inches below the surface, were located. Louis skilfully guided his boat between them. The tides and eddies caused by the waves breaking on these outer rocks made navigation difficult. Again and again the boat was caught in a side current and twisted around so that the sail, patched up of coats, flapped idly in the wind; but Louis managed each time to bring the craft around so that she could once more scud before the wind.

Twisting and winding among the sea of rocks and breakers, the craft passed the first range of rocks, and then plunged among the more dangerous line inside. Here the

tops of the rocks did not show above the water, except when the waves passed over them. Several times the boat grazed a jagged rock, careening so far over on her side that the boys thought their time had come. Finally a huge wave carried them directly toward a huge rock, and, in spite of the efforts of Louis, the boat passed over it.

"Now look out!" shouted Louis. "We're going!"

The boys dropped their sail and held firmly to the sides of the boat. The critical moment had arrived.

ARMAND E. BECHER

CHAPTER XIII

FOR a moment the wave carried the boat along without injury, and then a dull, grating noise underneath indicated that the bottom was scraping along on the top of the rock. The bow of the boat shot far up into the air, where it remained. The wave swept on, the swell being followed by the trough. But the boat did not descend. It twisted a little to the port side, and there remained, perched high and dry above the crest of the next wave. In this position they waited for some time, not one of the boys daring to speak. Warren glanced down from his high perch, looking with awe at the seething water below. So delicately balanced was the craft on the top of the rock that a slight movement of any one of its occupants would have served to dislodge it.

"We 're caught on the rock!" exclaimed Louis. "But the next wave will carry us off. Look out then for a capsize!"

But the next wave was a small one, and the crest of it merely lapped the stern and sides of the boat without disturbing its equilibrium. The second proved equally ineffective. The wave that had carried them so far up had been unusually large, and few others could approach it in size and momentum.

Louis, realizing this, looked seaward, watching the different swells as they formed to make their final dash against the rocks. Some were broken and shattered by the outside rocks, and others were caught by counter-currents and eddies which broke their force. When they reached the identical rock on which the craft was caught, they were unable to make an effective demonstration of their power. The tide was falling, and Louis grew more apprehensive. He did not fancy being wrecked in this fashion. All around was deep water, and ahead of them were other treacherous shoals and rocks to pass.

"Are we going to stay here all night?" asked Harold, turning toward Louis for a reply.

"Not if I can help it," was the reply. "The tide is falling, but we must get off somehow."

"If the tide is falling, why aren't we safer here than in those waves?" asked Frank. "I prefer to be here rather than down there," pointing to the rocks and water below.

"You could starve here as well as on the ice floe," Louis answered shortly.

"So can you on the shore. I don't see anything to eat."

There was no answering this argument. Night was falling rapidly around them, and Louis was soon convinced that the giant wave which had landed their boat on the high rock was the last of a series of big ones. No others would probably reach them until another tide. Meanwhile, the storm at sea would subside and the power of the breakers grow less. In that event they might after all reach the shore without being shipwrecked. In a calm sea he might pilot his boat safely through the rocks and breakers without wrecking it.

Somewhat consoled with this thought,

he proceeded to study the peculiar position in which they were placed. Cautiously looking over the side of the craft, he could see that the top of the rock was cut off on a slant of about forty-five degrees. The boat was caught midway on this incline, with the bow resting on the upper part of the rock, and the stern down. It was standing on a sort of natural cradle, but balanced so nicely that a slight jar might cause it to topple over.

"This won't be a very comfortable bed for the night," he said, explaining their position. "If Frank forgets himself in his sleep and rolls over on Warren's side, he'll topple the boat over into the sea, and we'll all be lost."

"Then I move that Frank be made to stay awake all night," Warren said. "He's a great roller in his sleep."

"I think we'll all have to sleep sitting up," Harold added. "If I move an inch the boat begins to rock."

"Harold is about right. We'll all keep watch together."

"I don't think I could sleep much with-

out something to eat, anyway," Warren replied. "I never knew what hunger was before."

"You 'll feel hungrier before you find anything to eat," answered Louis, gloomily.

"What can we do to get anything to eat when we land?" asked Frank.

"Dig clams and hunt for oysters and snails."

The suggestion of clams and oysters brought a new longing to the minds of the boys. Even Frank began to measure the distance between their craft and the shore with his eyes, as if anxious to make an early landing.

"Do clams and oysters grow up here?" he asked meditatively. "If they don't, we can find mussels and crabs, or possibly some scallops. Any kind of fish, in fact, would suit me."

"I would n't be very particular myself."

The sea around continued its booming and roaring, the waves breaking all along the coast on the rocks; but it was evident that the tide was falling rapidly. The crests of the waves came less and less near

the boat. Finally the rock was exposed several feet below the bottom of the boat. Louis looked over the side of the craft, as if anxious to climb down and investigate their surroundings below; but darkness was settling down so rapidly that it was unwise to make such a venture.

"Well, we're in for an all-night siege of it," he said, as he looked up. "We may as well take turns watching and sleeping. We'll need all our strength in the morning, when we attempt to land."

"I can't sleep," said Frank.

"Then Frank and I will take the first watch, and Warren and Harold can sleep now."

"I can't sleep either," Warren answered.

"Oh, in that case I'll take my sleep now," Louis replied. "Harold, turn over and forget that you're perched sky-high on a rock over the sea off the Labrador coast. Dream of old Sheffield, and I'll do the same."

"All right, Louis. I'll try it."

But in the darkness he made a grimace that seemed to belie his words. There

was not much sleep in any of them; but Louis was more of a sailor and knew the need of husbanding his strength. He placed his head on the side of the boat, and in a few moments he was in dreamland. He heard the whisperings of his three companions in the bow of the boat, but their murmurings were, in time, blended with the visions of his dreams.

Louis was a sound sleeper under almost any circumstances, and his hard day's work and exhaustion from lack of food made his slumbers so profound that he did not heed the roaring of the waves. In a few moments Harold placed his head on his hands, and sleep swallowed up all his worries and troubles.

The two left on watch continued their conversation in the bow of the boat for some time, and then they dreamily fell to listening to the murmuring of the waves. The tide had fallen down so that rocks were bare all around them. The moon appeared from between scudding clouds, and the midnight aspect of the sea was not forbidding. After the storm it looked cold

but picturesque, while the angry waves had their worst features hidden from view by darkness. Neither of the two boys realized the importance of the duty given to him. There was little to watch, for that matter, and when their eyelids drooped they did not dream of the guilt of the soldier who slept on his post.

But slowly and surely the tide which had receded so far from the rocks now returned, creeping up inch by inch, while the two watchers slept on their post. Each succeeding wave covered a higher mark on the rocks, and lapped a little nearer to the edge of the stranded boat. All was quiet and peaceful then. The storm had subsided; the wind had ceased to howl, and the waves alone indicated the restless character of the sea. These continued to roll in from the ocean, and, as they reached the rocks, they broke over them with loud roaring.

Louis, unconscious of danger, and not charging his mind with it, slept on peacefully, not thinking that the watch would be prolonged much after midnight. The first

wave to strike the boat merely lapped gently over a part of the keel, and then rushed on to join its comrades. The succeeding waves gently raised the stern of the craft, but not high enough to float it. The tide was dangerously high now, and the boat swung uneasily around on the crest of each billow. But still the exhausted boys slept.

Finally, a huge wave crept in from the open sea, gaining terrific momentum as it approached the shore. It broke with a wild roar on the outer line of rocks, and then dashed up against the stranded craft. It lifted the boat upon its crest as easily as if it had been a feather, and, twisting it around and around, flung it forward in a straight line for the beach.

Louis felt the strange upward motion, and, opening his eyes, he gave a yell that awakened every sleeper. The warning was given none too soon. The boat was now in the maw of the huge wave, twisting, whirling, and bobbing about in the most dizzy manner. The four boys tried to gain their feet, but they could not. Then,

as they glared with wild eyes at the scene, the craft was quickly toppled over, and in another moment the green water received the four sailors. Struggling in its grasp, they felt themselves buffeted around with ruthless energy, until, bruised and half drowned, they were washed into shoaler water, where, at each retreat of the waves, they could touch bottom.

When the boat was first overturned, Louis tried to cling to its sides, shouting to his companions to do the same ; but his words of warning were smothered by a wave which completely overwhelmed him. He lost his hold of the boat, and then clutched blindly around in the darkness to find it again. His arms suddenly clasped an object which proved to be Harold. The two boys clung together thereafter, with a clutch that could not be loosened.

The waves carried them over another rock, which hurt and scarred their legs; but they could not stop in their headlong journey toward the beach. They were finally released from the relentless fury of the wave in water just above their waists.

Louis realized their position first, and, clearing his mouth of water, he said to his companion:

"Swim in with the next wave, and then crawl for the shore!"

The next wave was upon them before he had hardly finished his words, and the two leaped upward, to swim along on its crest. With what appeared like incredulous speed, they were hurried along and flung with considerable force upon the beach of sand and stones. The wave retreated, and they stood only knee-deep in water.

"Thank God, we are safe!" Louis said, with a sob in his throat.

Then, in almost the same breath, he gasped: "But where are Frank and Warren?"

Harold was so exhausted with the struggle in the water that he could not reply. He staggered upon the beach, and flung himself down on the sand. Louis tried hard to catch a glimpse of either one of the other two shipwrecks. Once he saw a dark object riding the crest of a wave,

and he rushed down the beach toward it; but a moment later he saw that it was their wrecked boat, tossed about in the waves.

Returning to where Harold lay, he suddenly saw what appeared to be a rock on the edge of the water. He was about to pass this, when, in the clear moonlight, he saw that it was the figure of a human being. Hurrying to its side, he placed a hand on the head, and turned it over. The white face of Warren stared up at him with blank, open eyes.

Louis turned the prostrate body over, and shook him. "Warren!" he shouted in his ears. "Warren! Are you dead?"

But the sightless eyes only stared dumbly at him. Still unwilling to believe that he was dead, Louis shouted to Harold:

"Come here and help me revive Warren! Quick, Harold, or it will be too late!"

Stimulated to action by this call for help, Harold rose with difficulty from his position on the beach, and hurried to the rescue.

"He still lives," Louis said. "I felt his heart beating. We must bring him to."

They toiled over him for half an hour, rolling and pounding him to get the water out of his lungs, and finally, stripping him, they rubbed his body and limbs until their muscles ached with the exertion. Their efforts were finally rewarded by a sigh, and a few moments later the eyes which stared at them recognized them.

"Are we all safe?" Warren murmured.

"All except Frank," Louis answered. "Did you see him after the accident?"

"Yes, he was clinging to the boat. I was washed off, and he was still clinging to it."

"Then he may be saved yet. The boat is coming in down the shore. We 'll go to his aid, if he 's on it."

CHAPTER XIV

MORNING dawned bright and clear on the beach. The three shipwrecked watchers had waited in vain for their boat to reach the shore. As if carried down the coast by some contrary current, it had floated on the top of the waves all night, approaching and receding from the shore, but never quite coming within the reach of the three expectant watchers. Whether Frank was on it was somewhat conjectural. As it bobbed up and down, a black object could be seen on the opposite side, but the moonlight never gave them a good view of it.

When morning made the surface of the sea plain and distinct to their view, the scene had been shifted nearly five miles away from the point where the shipwreck had first occurred. The current was steadily working down the coast, and Louis

feared that another tide might carry the craft beyond their reach.

But fortunately a stiff breeze sprang up from the ocean, and this slowly drifted the overturned boat toward the beach. Half a mile ahead the boys discovered a range of low-lying rocks which seemed to protrude a long distance out in the water. If the boat did not drift farther away from the shore, it could not pass these rocks without touching them.

"We must try to stop it down there," Louis advised, pointing to the rocks. "We must get out on them and wait for her."

Running briskly down the beach, they reached the rocks long before the boat, and, Louis leading the way, they stepped cautiously from rock to rock. The water surged between the rocks, and raced as through a mill-canal. The leap from rock to rock was sometimes wide and threatening, but, unmindful of their own danger, the three boys hurried along. Before the boat was abreast of the rocks, they were grouped on the extreme end of the line.

Warren suddenly exclaimed, shading his eyes with his hands:

"There is Frank! See! he raised a hand from the boat!"

The others saw the signal, too, and their eagerness to intercept the boat was increased tenfold. It seemed incredulous that Frank had been half in the water and half out of it all night, and could still raise a hand above his head.

"We must do something to save him," Harold said.

But what that something was he could not say. Neither could Warren nor Louis. They were at the end of their resources. If the boat should drift past the rocks, they had no possible means of stopping it. They could not swim out to it, nor throw a line to it. They were as helpless in their emergency as any three boys possibly could be. They glanced up occasionally at the rugged barrenness of the coast, as if hoping and expecting that some one would come to their relief from that quarter. But they might be a thousand miles from any human habitation or person.

The tide rippled around the edge of the rocks with great force, and, if the boat once was caught in the current, it would be quickly carried out farther from the shore. Louis realized the danger, and braced himself for action, stepping as far out on the last rock as possible. The boat struck the rocks a dozen feet inside, and rebounded; but three pairs of hands grasped it. Instead of holding the boat, every one of the boys was jerked from his position and pulled into deep water.

"Swim with one hand!" shouted Louis. "Swim for the rocks!"

With all their strength and energy the boys swam with one arm, while they clung to the boat with the other. The tide was running against them, but Louis felt one foot touch a rock near the surface, and with the momentum gained by this, he shoved the head of the boat straight between two of the outer rocks. The water pouring between these rocks partly counteracted the outward flow of the current, and in another moment the boat was securely wedged between them.

Climbing upon the rocks, the boys made doubly sure of their boat by forcing half her length into the narrow space. The water boiled and surged around the craft, but it could not dislodge her. During all these proceedings Frank clung to the stern of the boat, to which he had managed to lash himself with a loose rope. He was still out in deep water, but Louis quickly crawled over the keel of the boat and grasped him by the arms.

"Let go, Frank," he said. "I have you now."

Willingly the hands relaxed their grip. They were blue with the cold, and the fingers were hard and knotted with cramps. The long night in the water had nearly exhausted Frank, but he was still game. While he allowed Louis to pull him slowly through the water to the rocks, he tried to smile and make some light remark. But he was really more exhausted than he supposed. When he attempted to climb upon the rocks, his legs weakened, and he stumbled.

"You can't walk, Frank," Warren said.

"I don't see how we can get you ashore yet. We can't carry you over these rocks."

"No, but we can tow him in the boat," Louis answered. "He can go to land in some sort of comfort."

After depositing Frank comfortably on the dry rocks, to rest and bask in the sun, the three young sailors proceeded, under the directions of Louis, to turn the boat right side up. First, the painter in the bow was securely tied to one of the rocks, and then, with the help of the tide, she was swung broadside upon the rocks. In this position it was an easy matter to turn her over without taking in much water.

"Now, Frank, let us help you in, and we'll play canal boat with you. We'll make good tow horses or mules."

With difficulty the exhausted boy was helped into the boat, and then, leaping from rock to rock, the procession started for shore. When the boat finally grated on the sand, they gave vent to three cheers. They had landed safely, after a

series of accidents and experiences sufficient to make hardened sailors turn pale with fear and dread.

"It seems like an age since we left the *Northern Star*," said Louis. "I wonder where she is anyway!"

"I 'm wondering more where our breakfast is coming from," Warren replied.

"From the sand under your feet," Louis answered. "Let me show you."

He dug down in the sand with a shell, and in a few moments hauled up a clam which had been buried in the sand. This he proceeded to open by cracking the shells with two stones. Then, offering the contents to Frank, he said:

"Here, you need some food more than we do. I 'll wait for the next course."

Warren and Harold had each picked up clam-shells, and the three were speedily engaged in digging for clams. They were plentiful on the coast, and mixed with them were snails and scallops, which the boys ate greedily in their raw state. This breakfast much refreshed them.

"Now we must find water," Frank said,

"for we lost all our rain-water when the boat was turned over."

"We 'll find a spring or stream somewhere," Louis said. "I don't think we 'll die from thirst here on the land."

"Let Harold stay here with Frank, while we go to the top of the cliffs to explore," Warren said. "When we reach the top we 'll wave to you, and, if we find anything good, we 'll shout."

"Don't be gone long, then," Frank replied, looking up anxiously at the summit of the cliffs. "We 'll be crazy to know what kind of country you discover back of you."

"We 'll report at once," Louis promised.

The cliffs were steep and rocky, and the two climbers had to walk along their sides for some distance before they could find any place for a foothold. A deep cleft had been cut out by the sea, which, at some time, had battered against the rocks until they had yielded and split asunder. The water had formed a small river here, and by means of climbing from one boulder to another, clinging to stunted growths of cedar and bushes, the

boys were enabled to work their way slowly toward the summit.

As they proceeded, their footpath grew steeper and more rugged, and more than once they were half inclined to abandon the climb. Finally, Louis caught a glimpse of the green trees and bushes above his head, and shouted: "We're nearly there, Warren."

The line of vegetation was reached, and for the first time the climbers rested and looked around them. Down on the beach they could see their two companions resting on the sand, and, beyond them, the line of coast and the great blue sea. As far as they could see there was no appearance of a vessel on the ocean. Louis stood up and gazed around anxiously from one point of the compass to the other. The thought of his father's fate worried him. Had the *Northern Star* been able to ride out the storm safely, or had she been wrecked? If she was safe and sound, he knew that she would return to the scene of their mishap as soon as possible.

"She must have been blown far out to sea," he mused aloud.

"Who — what? — the iceberg?" asked Warren, not able to follow his thoughts. "Why, no, it has n't. I saw the top of it over there. See, is n't that the ice floe, or what 's left of it?"

"Yes, it is," Louis answered. "But I was thinking of the *Northern Star*."

"Do you think she 's safe, and will she pick us up soon?"

"I don't know, but I hope so. However, it won't do us any good to worry about it. Come, we must reach the top of this cliff, and see what kind of a country is back of us."

They started up and climbed rapidly through the mass of bushes and trees. The ascent was easy now, for the vegetation was growing on the edge of the cliff, and the incline was not difficult. Within ten minutes they stood on the summit and waved their hands to the two companions on the beach. Behind them was one dense line of woods, which covered a rolling, hilly country that gradually backed

up to the line of mountains. There was absolute desolation and solitude on all sides. No habitation might be within hundreds of miles. The coast was one of the loneliest on the North Atlantic. Louis expected this, and was not disappointed.

"We 've got to look after ourselves for a time yet," he said. "There 's no one to help us. We 'll put up our first signal of distress, however, and, if any ship passes this way, a boat will be sent ashore. I imagine sailors are wrecked on this coast a good many times in the course of a year."

Ripping out the lining of his vest, Louis proceeded to secure it to the highest branch of one of the tall, storm-scarred cedars which towered far above all other points on the cliff. When this flag of distress was securely fastened on the top of the tree, he descended, and the two proceeded to make the descent.

When they reached the beach below, Harold ran toward them, showing unusual excitement in his voice and actions.

"Somebody has been on this beach," he shouted. "I 've found their camp-fire."

Louis and Warren broke into a run. Harold beckoned them to a point above high water-mark, where stones had been piled in a semicircle. Here were the charred remains of driftwood that had been used for a fire. Remains of clam-shells and fish-bones were also visible on every side. Louis picked up some of the dead coals, and examined and smelt of them critically.

"Yes, this fire was burning recently," he said finally. "It was put out by that storm which wrecked us."

"Then help is not so far away, after all," Warren said.

"Not unless they are shipwrecked sailors like ourselves, or cannibals like those which Robinson Crusoe found. It might be in order to hunt for their foot-prints in the sand."

"The recent storm has washed them out. We can't do that."

"Then we can make a hunt for the men, or keep on the lookout all the time. They 'll come down here again."

"But if they were — " stammered Har-

old. "No, I didn't mean cannibals, but half-starved wild men, or —"

The boys laughed at this hesitating expression of fear, but there was a nervous ring to their laugh which was not very reassuring to Harold.

CHAPTER XV

THE knowledge that others were not far from them on the lonely beach gave a new element of interest to their life. Whatever they attempted to do was with half an eye on the possible chance that they would suddenly be discovered. The charred sticks of wood piled around the circle of stones were not the only evidence that the beach had been recently inhabited. While wandering around in search of clams and driftwood, Harold discovered an old sailor's handkerchief which had been knotted as if to hold something. This second piece of evidence was carried triumphantly back to camp.

"This shows that they are sailors," Louis said. "They have probably been shipwrecked like us, and they are living somewhere back in the woods."

"If they are near us, they should see our signal flying from the top of the tree,"

Frank suggested, pointing up at the fluttering cloth.

"Yes, they 'll see it, and any day we may expect a visit from them."

During the rest of the day, the four castaways, having beached their boat, prepared to build a sort of rude hut as a shelter from the cold night or possible rain. Frank was still too weak and exhausted to walk far, and all attempts to explore inland or down the coast were abandoned for the present. In the afternoon, a stream of water emptying into the ocean was found trickling down the rocks, and all fear of suffering from lack of water was banished. By emptying their pockets the boys discovered that they had nearly a full box of matches among them. These were carefully spread out in the sun to dry. By evening they were ready to use, and Frank succeeded in making a fire after the third attempt.

Driftwood was plentiful on the beach, and a roaring fire was soon blazing away. As a matter of economy with their matches, they decided to keep the

fire going all night, piling driftwood on it as it burnt low.

"It will help as a signal for passing vessels," Louis said; "and, besides, it will make it seem less lonely."

Their supply of food was further increased by the discovery of a small arm of the sea, which washed over a low ridge of sand at high tide, and carried fish with it, leaving them stranded in shoal water as the tide retreated. In this small pond, scarcely a foot deep at low water, the boys found scores of small and large fish imprisoned. By driving them up toward one end of the shallow pond, they were able to catch one after considerable trouble.

Then Warren said: "I have a better way than that. We 'll drain this pond, and capture all we want."

"Eureka, Warren, you 're a genius!" shouted Frank. "You should copyright that idea."

The level of the pond was a couple of feet above the surface of the ocean. The boys cut a drain at the lowest point,

and proceeded to build a dam through which the water could escape, but no fish. When they started the water to flow through the dam, the fish gradually moved toward it, but as they were brought up against the shoals, they retreated in terror. The water slowly but surely drained off, until there was scarcely a foot left at the deepest point. In this shallow pond were collected enough fish to last the boys for a week. Flopping around, they tried in vain to escape their pursuers. The boys picked them up without difficulty.

"See here, we won't be able to eat all of these," Louis said; "and it's too much like murder to kill them for nothing. Suppose we take what we want, and throw the others in the sea before they die."

"But how about to-morrow and the next day?"

"Oh, we'll keep enough for two days' provisions, and then I think we can catch more in the same way."

"All right! Here goes my big fellow!"

It was the biggest catch of fish the boys had ever seen, and, as they carried most of them and threw them back into the ocean, they experienced more actual pleasure than if they were catching them with hooks. The fish, glad of their escape, disappeared like flashes of light into the ocean.

"Glad to get home again," muttered Harold.

"Yes, next to getting there yourself is the pleasure of seeing somebody else, even if it is a fish," replied Warren, with an unconscious sigh.

Usually this remark would have called forth cries of derision, for there were unmistakable indications of intense homesickness in the voice and words; but not one of the boys replied to it. Instead, they turned silently around and walked back to their temporary camp. When they reached it, Louis proceeded to scale and clean the fish with great energy. Frank stirred the embers of the fire with his stick, and Harold and Warren looked on.

"Want any help, Louis?" asked Warren, hands in pocket and eyes staring hard at the coals of fire.

"No, I can clean enough for this meal, but you'd better look on and learn how. Some day you may not have me to do it for you."

"Oh, we'll help, if you put it that way," retorted Warren, nettled at the sharpness of the reply, for his thoughts were still of home.

Louis grunted, but made no answer, cleaning and scraping away with his knife. Warren still looked gloomily down at the fire, and Frank fed it in silence, while he poked at the coals with his stick.

One of the largest fish was cleaned and flung down on a slab of stone which the boys had selected for a frying-pan. "You can cook that one on the hot stone," Louis said; "but I'll have mine spitted, and broiled on a stick."

Suiting action to his words, he proceeded to whittle out a stout stick from a piece of driftwood, and, running this through the next fish lengthwise, he held

it up before the flames. Then the odor of the cooking fish filled their nostrils, and they sniffed long and delightedly, drawing unconsciously nearer the fire. Frank's fish was also sizzling on its hot slab of stone, and when he attempted to turn it with a flat stick the meat stuck to it, and filled the air with an aroma that appealed to every hungry lad. Warren suddenly forgot his memories of home, and Harold no longer watched, with absent-minded eyes, the process before him.

"This makes me hungry," the former said suddenly, squatting himself on the sand near the fire. "I never knew fish to have such an odor and fragrance before."

Harold laughed, and said: "Why, up at Sheffield, Warren, you always hated fish day, and said any kind of fish made you sick."

"But this is n't Sheffield," was the prompt answer.

"No, it 's a new Robinson Crusoe's island," Frank added.

"Well, for my part," Louis began, strip-

ping off a piece of his broiled fish, "I think it's better than Robinson Crusoe's island. We are four instead of one, and we have no Man Friday or canni—"

With his mouth stuffed full of fish, and his sentence half finished, Louis stared in blank amazement over the heads of his companions. All three were so busy eating their share of the fish that they did not notice the sudden change in the appearance of his face.

"Well, go on," Frank said without looking up. "What bright comparison were you going to make with this inhospitable shore and Robinson—"

Frank also stopped midway in his sentence and stared at Louis. "What is it?" he asked, seeing the expression of his companion's face. Warren and Harold also glanced up, and then all three followed with their eyes the direction in which Louis was staring.

Down on the beach, a hundred yards away, was drawn up their boat, and by it stood four queer-looking creatures. No description of cannibals could quite apply

to these men. They were clad in the most outlandish garb known to savagery or civilization. A bear-skin hung over the shoulders of one, and dragged below the knees, without belt or other circlet to hold it in at the waist. Another had parts of a sealskin, patched to make rude sort of garments; but the skin had been rudely taken from the animal, leaving clots of blood and flesh clinging to it. The other two men were dressed in the skins of foxes and ermines, with a few patches of blue flannel and black cloth, worn greasy and threadbare. All four had long, unkempt hair and beards; no shoes were on their feet, and their eyes were sharp and wolfish.

They were strong, muscular men, the largest being considerable over six feet, and the others not many inches shorter. They were dark and bronzed, their bare arms and legs gleaming almost like brass in the sunlight. In some mysterious way they had appeared on the beach while the boys were cooking their dinner, and they stood grouped around the boat, as if debating whether to launch it or not. Louis

and the others stared in silence at the four men, none caring to express the thoughts which were running in their minds.

When the men glanced up at the camp-fire, and caught the odor of cooking fish they turned and walked toward it. Like ravenous wild animals on the scent of game, they hurried along the beach, and approached the group of frightened boys, their wolfish eyes and teeth gleaming in the sunlight. Warren and Harold made a motion as if to rise and run; but Louis placed a restraining hand on them, and said softly:

"Don't move! Let them think we're not afraid of them. We must all stick together!"

CHAPTER XVI

WITH quaking hearts, the four boys watched the approaching strangers. A nearer view did not modify their first unsightly appearance. Their half-naked bodies were more repulsive on a nearer view, and their eyes, half concealed from view by heavy eyebrows, were not reassuring. Their shifty, stealthy glances betrayed natures that were not to be trusted. Their appearance on the isolated beach was a mystery to the boys, and Louis realized, more than the others, that there was something unusual and inexplicable in their dwelling in such a place. They were not ordinary shipwrecked sailors, nor sealers from St. John's, who were frequently caught in their small boats by ice floes and cast upon the coast during stormy weather. There was little of the sailor or sealer in their clothes or general appearance.

Without the formality of an introduction, the four men stepped close up to the fire, and the tallest, with a grunt of satisfaction, leaned over and picked up some of the cooked fish. Holding this in both hands, he proceeded to rend and tear it to shreds with his teeth. At first Louis decided to resent this, but in the next breath he changed his mind.

"Oh, I see you are half starved," he said, picking up the piece of driftwood which had served as a plate. "Here is enough for all of you."

Holding the flat board so that the first man could not reach it, he passed the broiled fish around to his three companions. Their eyes lighted up with greed and hunger. Three pairs of hands quickly swept the board clean of fish, and, like ravenous wolves eating their dinner, they snapped and snarled away as they devoured the food. When they had finished, they looked around for more.

"That is all we have," Louis said. "But if you are still hungry we can catch more for you on the next tide."

"Yes, get more for us," grunted the tallest of the four. "We 're very hungry. Got matches to make the fire?"

The man proceeded to run a hand into the pocket of Louis, who stepped back, and said sharply: "The matches are not there."

"Where then? Our matches nearly gone, and we want more. Where are they?"

Louis shook his head. The man glared hard at him.

"Where are the matches?" he demanded, stepping up to Louis in a threatening manner.

"I cannot tell you," was the prompt but firm reply.

There was a snarl of anger from the man; but Louis was unflinching, and did not retreat when the man approached.

Possibly a quarrel and fight would have developed then and there had not the other men stepped up to their leader and pulled him away.

"Don't do that," they said. "He 'll get us more fish soon, and cook it for us; if you hurt him, he won't."

This logic appealed to the man's stomach, and he retreated with a few parting snarls and grunts. With a stick he turned over the coals of fire and searched in them for any farther vestiges of a meal. Louis and his companions stood grouped together, while the four half-wild men were standing opposite. The boys assumed an attitude of quiet defiance. Frank, almost unconsciously, clasped the heavy stick with which he had been stirring the fire, while Warren held a heavy stone in his right hand. Louis was for pacifying the men, but his hands were folded tightly over his shirt, in whose folds was concealed the only knife the boys owned.

When the strange visitors had finished their inspection of the fire and the camp, they turned once more upon the boys.

"Where did you come from?" one of them asked. "How did you get here? Shipwrecked?"

"We were lost from our ship on a cake of ice, and we were driven ashore in our small boat," Louis responded promptly.

"Was the ship wrecked?" asked the leader of the group.

"No, it was blown out to sea by the storm. We expect it back any day or hour."

The men turned their eyes toward the ocean, and scanned the horizon in every direction. Then the leader spoke again, pointing up to the flag flying from the top of the cliff.

"That your signal?" he asked.

Louis nodded.

"You expect the ship to see that? You can't see that hill five miles away. You want to put it up on that point where our camp is."

Louis followed the direction of the man's finger, and saw in the distance a much higher cliff which towered several hundred feet above the one under which they stood.

"You have a camp there?" he asked, taking his turn to ask questions.

The man nodded affirmatively.

"Where did you come from?" Louis persisted.

"We were shipwrecked here."

"When? Not lately?" added Louis, noting the man's dress. "I should say that you had been living in this lonely region for years."

The man looked suspiciously at him, and then replied:

"Yes, two years. We were wrecked then, and we've lived here ever since."

"Two years? And never rescued?"

There was a note of alarm and incredulity in the voice. Could it be possible that their fate was to be similar? Were they to be banished to this lonely part of the coast for two long years, without seeing friends or relatives?

The man apparently saw the boy's fear, and he grinned, as he added: "Yes, two years, and we'll stay two years more. Ships never touch this part of the coast. And you'll have to live on raw food and berries. You can't buy matches up here."

Louis appreciated immediately the man's effort to secure the few matches in his possession. The taste of cooked food had aroused their old fear. They were now

ready to commit murder to get possession of the matches; but Louis was equally determined that they should not rob him.

"But we can save the few we have," he replied.

"Not if you make a fire every day to cook your food."

"We don't intend to. We shall keep this fire going all the time. If it goes out, then we can make no other."

"What! You got no more matches?" demanded the man, sharply.

"Not to waste," Louis answered calmly.

Once more the old cupidity and fierceness entered the eyes of the man, and he seemed to sway between an inclination to pounce upon Louis and rob him of his precious possessions, and a strong desire to control himself in the interest of peace. Louis, wishing to change the subject, said quickly:

"Are you men not from St. John's? I think I have heard of your ship. It was wrecked somewhere off this coast, and there were —"

This speech suddenly created a sen-

sation among the men. With a sudden new interest in other things, they turned and walked toward the ocean, muttering some denial that they ever hailed from St. John's or any other provincial city. When half-way down to the edge of the water, the leader stopped, and called back:

"We 'll come back when you have more fish cooked for us."

Then, without leave or permission, they stalked down to the edge of the water and proceeded to launch the boat of the *Northern Star*, which the boys had saved with such difficulty.

"They are stealing our boat," said Warren. "Let us stop them."

Frank and Harold were inclined to join Warren in a struggle for their rights, but Louis placed a restraining hand on them once more, and said: "No, no. We don't want a fight, if we can help it."

"But they can't take our boat," protested Warren.

"They said they would come back in a short time. It is time enough then to decide to fight for our rights."

The boys quieted down a little, but they were far from feeling satisfied. When the men finally launched the boat, and started to row it down the line of surf with the rude oars, which the boys had picked up on the beach, Warren turned in disgust to say:

"It's a shame to let them go off like that, Louis. They think we are afraid of them!"

"Well, aren't we, a little?" Louis replied with a smile. "I confess I don't know what to make of them. They have certainly been shipwrecked here, but so long ago that they have almost degenerated into savages. They are a queer lot, and I'm afraid a dangerous crowd. There is nothing up here to make them afraid of killing us as they please. If we should get into trouble with them, we would not have much show."

"Then you think our best plan is to escape — to leave here before they return?" asked Frank, anxiously.

"I would advise that ordinarily. But we can't go now. They would soon track

and overtake us. For the present, we must stand together and try to make peace with them."

"But if you call giving up everything to them making peace, I don't see the good of it."

"Nor I," growled Harold.

"No — not giving up everything," Louis replied. "There is a limit to everything. We can divide with them, and that is all. If we can keep them quiet until Frank is able to travel again, I think our best plan will be to leave them. If they pursue us, we will fight them. But we must be prepared for it, and be armed."

"What with? Stone axes and arrowheads?" scornfully asked Harold. "I don't see what other arms we can find!"

"Well, in the stone age they did some pretty good execution with stone axes," Frank said. "And then remember David killed Goliath with a pebble and sling."

"Which reminds me," Warren added, "that I have been trying to make a sling out of this twine I found in my pocket,

to kill some of these birds. I think fish three times a day as food will get tiresome. I 'm going to have a bird for my supper."

" Necessity is the mother of invention," Louis answered, "and Warren is already proving it. If he can make a sling and kill at twenty feet, I 'll make a bow and arrow that will do as good execution."

" Then I 'll stand back of the archers with the battle-axe," Frank added, "and Harold can use the spear. With a company of archers, a battalion of spearmen, and a line of heavy battle-axe wielders, I think we will be invincible."

" In that case, suppose we hold a council of war now, and decide upon what to do," suggested Louis.

There was unanimous agreement to this, and for the first time the castaways sat down in a circle and seriously considered how best to meet the unexpected emergency that had forced itself upon them. It was clear to all of them that the proximity of the four men added to their difficulties, and, instead of welcoming

them, the boys were prepared to offer battle to assert their independence and rights. But it was a struggle that might end disastrously to them, and not one of the four underestimated the real dangers presented.

CHAPTER XVII

NIGHT settled over the land and sea, shutting out the objects along the coast, so that an enemy might have crept upon the boys without arousing their suspicions. All the afternoon they had watched and waited for the reappearance of the strange men, and when dusk came Louis grew nervous. Under the light of the sun their case was not so hopeless, but, with only the dim moonlight to guide them, it seemed like quite another question. In their council of war they had decided to wait for the men, and then to make strenuous opposition to their appropriation of the boat; but the approach of night disconcerted their plans.

"I don't like to meet them here after dark," Louis said finally.

"Nor I," Frank volunteered emphatically. "In the daytime I felt that we had a show, but under the cover of darkness they might creep upon us, and —"

"Rob us of our matches," returned Louis, trying to smile.

"If they did n't do anything worse, we might be thankful," Frank said.

"Then I move that we break camp, and hide in a new place," Warren suggested, peering up and down the coast.

"I think that is the best thing for us to do."

"We 'd do better if we took to the woods," Harold added. "We know that there are woods up at the top of the cliff, and why not climb up there and hide in them?"

"That would suit me," returned Frank, "if somebody will help me to climb the cliff. I don't think I 'm equal to it alone yet."

"Oh, we 'll pull you up," Warren replied, "if we have to rig up a block and tackle and use seaweed for ropes."

Louis suddenly rose from his position, and said:

"I think we should be moving. These men may appear any moment, and I don't like the appearances of things. We can

easily disappear in this darkness, and hide where they would never find us."

"Lead away, Louis, and we follow."

"Don't forget our luggage," added Warren. "We may never return."

"Then I want my stone frying-pan," Frank said. "I never tasted such fine fish before, and I 'm sure that the stone had something to do in making it so sweet."

"Come, Frank, we 've got to carry you; don't make us carry your stone frying-pan too!"

Despite the fear which encompassed their minds, they tried to make light of their trip up the cliff to escape any secret midnight visit from the strange castaways. There were frequent jokes and quips passed, and, as they toiled along, any mishap to one was sure to call forth merriment from the others. Finally Louis had to interpose.

"We must make less noise," he said. "You would n't think we were trying to hide. It sounds as if we were trying to attract the enemy's attention to our new camping ground."

After that they trudged along in the darkness quietly, keeping closer together as they mounted the sides of the steep cliff. At some points, they were nearly baffled in their endeavors by the darkness, but waiting for favorable gleams of moonlight, they were enabled gradually to overcome all obstacles and reach the summit.

From this lofty position they gazed by moonlight far out upon the enchanting scene. The ocean was quiet and majestic in its loneliness, and the white line of seacoast, reaching out in either direction, marked its confines with a ghostly boundary. Back of the cliffs the dark outlines of the woods, hills, and mountains added gloom and solemnity to the scene. The boys rested on the summit, and looked down upon their former camp, five hundred feet below.

"I 'm glad we are up here," Frank said. "I feel safer."

"I don't think they will follow us," Warren answered.

Louis suddenly gripped the arm of each

boy, and said sharply, "Look! Look over there! Is that a light?"

Every eye was turned down the coast, in the direction Louis indicated. Then, in almost a single voice they exclaimed:

"Yes, it's a light! A ship or lighthouse! What is it, Louis?"

Louis was as greatly puzzled as his companions. He had no word of explanation to offer. He shook his head quietly, and continued to stare at the strange light. Then suddenly, while he gazed, it disappeared. All four uttered an exclamation of wonder.

"Then it was n't a ship," said Warren, in disappointed tones.

"I don't know," was all that Louis replied.

"If it was a lighthouse, it would return," Harold said. "Watch for it, and see if it comes back."

Even while he spoke, the light flashed again from out of the darkness, and spread a faint glimmer across the sea. They waited until it had disappeared, and reappeared three times, before a word was

spoken. Then Louis said, drawing in a breath of relief:

"It is a lighthouse! We are not so far from civilization after all. To-morrow morning we will make an early start for it."

"Why not to-night?" Harold asked. "I'd sleep so much better if I knew there was a solid roof over my head."

"Have you any idea how far away that light may be?" asked Louis.

"No, but we could reach it before morning."

"Well, it may be fifty miles away, and we may have to cross a river or two before we reach it."

"Then I wait until morning," Frank replied. "I don't want to swim any strange rivers by moonlight. I've had quite enough night swimming for a while."

"If we only had our boat, we could row down the coast and make better time. This tide sets down the coast, and we could take advantage of it in the morning."

"That's it!" Louis exclaimed suddenly. "We must get back our boat, and go down in it. We won't start for the lighthouse

until we recover the boat. If the men return in it, we will wait for them to land, and then make a rush for the boat. If they pursue us, I think we can give them a fair race. Frank, we shall expect you to lead the flying wedge with which we propose to break through their ranks, if they offer to head us off."

"I 'm better at the end just now, Louis, but you understand the tactics well, and I 'll appoint you centre rush."

"For that matter, we don't need any leader," Warren added. "Louis can give the word, and we 'll each race for the boat."

"Then we should get plenty of sleep to-night. For my part I 'm tired out and ready to go to sleep."

"So are we all."

The night air was cold and chilly, and the boys huddled close together to keep warm, but within a few minutes they were so soundly sleeping that any enemy might have stolen a march upon them. But hidden away among the trees and bushes, they were almost as safe in that great, far-away,

lonely land as if they had been in their own cots at the Sheffield School. Once in the night Louis was awakened by a noise which seemed like the breaking of a twig, but after a few moments of reflection, he decided that he was as safe as if they had been on the *Northern Star*.

When daylight dawned the light of the previous night had of course disappeared. Before they slept Louis had marked a circle in the earth, and, after quartering this, he designated the direction of the light. By means of this rude compass he could direct the course of their travels down the coast until the lighthouse should appear. Strain their eyes as they would, no signs of any object that could be mistaken for a lighthouse appeared in the distance.

Louis mused over this for some time, and then finally said:

"I did n't know that there was any lighthouse along this entire coast, except near the few harbors, and I know we are not anywhere near one of them. When the storm struck us, the *Northern Star's* latitude and longitude were not favorable

for reaching a harbor for weeks. I remember father saying as much."

"Probably then some more shipwrecked sailors are signalling for passing ships."

"I don't know that I care to meet them, then," suggested Frank. "The few specimens we have met are not very prepossessing."

"No, I don't think it is that," Louis added. "It is more probable that a party of sealers are camping ashore there, and they were flashing signals to their ship."

"In that event, we should make an effort to reach them," Warren interposed quickly. "We could go back home with them."

"Yes, we shall make our best effort to reach them. But first let us recover our boat."

"We should go down on the beach and practise the flying wedge. I think that would amuse the men when they come up for their breakfast of fish."

In the early morning light they climbed down the sides of the steep cliff, and began to rekindle the dying fire. There was no

sign of any one on the beach, and the boys proceeded to make another catch of fish in their trap. The tide had washed a generous supply into the small lagoon over night, and, when this was drained off as before, they had plenty of food for breakfast.

"The odor of this ought to bring the men back with the boat," Frank remarked, turning his fish with a flat stick. "Ah, it smells good, boys!"

Indeed it did have a savory odor, and the four young castaways sat down on the rocks and sand to a breakfast that was fit to serve before a king. With good appetites they devoured large pieces of fish, washing it down with clear spring water. A few wild berries they had picked on the top of the cliff added a little variety and relish to the meal.

"It is all right for the present," Frank remarked, when fully satisfied; "but I think we should have a change of diet soon. Fish, fish, fish, all the time may become monotonous in a few days."

"Beggars can't be choosers."

"No, but we are not beggars yet. I'm

going to hunt for something different pretty soon."

Just then Harold glanced up and shouted:

"Here come the men in our boat!"

Across the shimmering surface of the sea, the boat was gliding smoothly, and, as it approached nearer, they could see that it contained the four occupants of the previous day.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE boys waited quietly for the boat. They were anxious now to see the men land, for their plan of action was decided upon. Each boy had his cue. Frank was to wander away from the group, and reach an advantageous point near the boat before the others started on a rush for it. This would give Frank ample time to get in the boat safely, despite his weakness and lameness, before the men could overtake him.

"Once launched, we can get away from them easily," Louis said quietly, watching the approaching men. "But don't get anxious and make a mistake. If they suspect our motives, we 'll have trouble."

In a few moments the boat touched the shore, and was carried up on the beach on the crest of a big roller. Louis saw how it landed, and gave the advice in an undertone:

"We must pick up the boat two on a side, and carry it out on the waves as far as we can. Frank and I will take the right side, and Warren and Harold the left."

The four men tumbled out of the boat, and dragged it a few feet farther up on the sand. Then three of them started to walk toward the boys. The fourth man stood by the boat, but unwillingly. He talked fiercely and protestingly to the others.

"Gracious, one man is going to stay behind to guard the boat," muttered Frank. "That upsets our plan!"

Louis was staring hard at the men; then he said:

"We must let Frank get down to the boat and engage the man in conversation, before we make a run for it. Attract his attention to something on the ocean, Frank, and when his back is turned to us I will give the signal. Then we 'll have to bowl him over if he attempts to interfere."

These few words of admonition were

given while the three men were walking up the beach toward the camp. When they were within a few yards of the fire, Louis picked up some of the freshly cooked fish, and said:

"See, we have your fish cooked for you! Here 's plenty for all of you."

The men hurried forward to seize their portion. Then Louis added, turning to Frank: "Shall we send this down to the other man? He 'll want some. Here, Frank, take it to him."

The greedy men made no opposition to this, and Frank took the fish and walked rapidly toward the boat. The man left behind caught the odor of the fish, and went half-way to meet him. The two then strolled slowly down toward the boat, Frank talking, and the man eating.

From his position near the fire, Louis watched all this, and then suddenly he said: "Eat all you want, my men, for this may be your last meal with us. See, the fire is burning low."

When the men looked at the fire, Louis raised his arms high over his head. The

boys understood the signal. With one accord they turned and ran swiftly down the beach. When the three men looked up from the fire again they were alone. Three figures were half-way down the beach, running with all their might toward the boat. The man who was the leader of the gang saw through the ruse first, and, raising his voice in a cry of alarm, he started after them.

His voice attracted the attention of the fourth man with Frank, who, turning his head, quickly realized that there was something wrong. He started to head the boys off, making straight for the boat; but he was not quick enough for the young football player. Frank suddenly dropped down in front of him, and the man stumbled over his body and fell sprawling in the sand. Frank was instantly up again and running with all his might.

Ordinarily there would have been no trouble; but Frank was quite weak and lame, and he could not make fast time. The other boys were waiting for him

when he finally reached the boat. He was puffing and panting, but he took his place by the side of Louis.

"Now, one, two, three—lift!" shouted the latter.

They picked the craft up and carried it to the water. A wave struck it, and they had to wait until it receded. Then again they lifted and carried it outward. They were knee-deep, and a heavy roller struck them. They lost a few feet, and Harold stumbled and fell.

"Up now, and at it again!" whispered Louis, hoarsely. "The men will be here in a moment!"

Once more they lifted the boat and carried it out on a heavy roller, but just then the man Frank had tripped plunged into the water. Louis saw the danger, but he gave the boat a violent push, fell into water up to his arm-pits, and shouted:

"Jump aboard, and pull with the oars!"

He did not attempt to pull himself in the boat, but clung to the stern with one hand, and prepared to meet the man with the other. The boat was carried out by

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the wave, and then, meeting another, it was washed in again; but the boys caught the water with their rude oars and checked it. Then the receding wave carried it swiftly out from the shore. But it carried with it, too, the man who was fighting to get possession of the property. He plunged into the waves, and in another moment he reached out a hand to grasp the stern of the craft. But Louis had been waiting for this emergency. He had found time to rest and prepare for the conflict. With a sharp blow he struck the arm downward, but the hand did not relax its hold. Then he grasped it with one of his own, and tried to open the fingers.

There was a sharp, silent struggle in the water. When the man grasped the stern of the boat, the two were equal in the combat. But, meanwhile, the boys had rowed the boat out into deep water, and they thought they were safe.

They soon discovered their mistake, however, for a gurgling voice shouted: "Hold on, Bill, I'll help you!"

Louis cast a glance over his shoulder, and saw the leader of the men swimming with powerful strokes toward them. He took the waves so easily that it seemed as if he moved faster than the boat. It was no time to wait or think of other people's pain and suffering. It was time to take extreme action.

Louis climbed into the boat, ignoring the man by his side. Then picking up a heavy piece of driftwood, he said ominously:

"Let go of that boat, or I'll kill you!"

The man stared hard at him, but he was as determined as the boys to cling to the craft. Louis raised his stick threateningly:

"One, two, three!"

He brought the stick down heavily, and the man ducked his head; but Louis had no intention of striking him to kill. He had made his threat simply to attract his attention away from his intended point of attack. When the man's head was under water, Louis rapped the two hands clinging to the boat so sharply that they spasmodically relaxed their hold. Then, before

the man could renew his grasp, Louis pushed him off and away from the craft.

"Now pull hard!" he shouted, using his own stick to help the boat along.

The man left behind tried hard to swim and catch hold of the boat; but his fingers were tingling with pain, and he soon gave up the unequal struggle. The leader of the men persisted a little longer, and then he, too, returned to the shore. From this position they cursed the boys freely, and threatened them with all sorts of dreadful things.

"That was an expensive fish dinner for them," Frank said with a grin.

"But it was rather rough to take a fall out of that poor chap, and then rap his fingers with a stick of wood," added Warren.

"Don't waste your sympathy on them yet," Louis suggested. "We're not out of the woods. They're following us along the shore, and they'd make it warm for us if we landed."

"But we don't intend to land until we find that lighthouse."

"We won't be so sure of that either.

That lighthouse may prove very illusory. Stranger things have happened at sea before."

They drifted and rowed down the coast, the current helping them in their journey. The men on the shore followed, walking just abreast of the boat. It was clearly their intention not to let the boys land. In time, hunger and thirst would force them to the shore. Then, either a conflict with the men, or the loss of their boat again, would inevitably follow.

"We must outwit them some way," suggested Warren.

"Under the cover of darkness, we can land somewhere, and hide the boat."

Louis shook his head dubiously. He was not satisfied that any feasible plan had yet been discovered. Without working hard at the oars, they made good headway down the coast, every eye vigilantly watching for anything that would suggest the possible presence of a lighthouse. One headland of rock after another was passed, and still they saw nothing promising.

CHAPTER XIX

THE hunt for the lighthouse proved a more formidable undertaking than any of the boys had imagined, for, as they learned before night, no such sailor's beacon was built anywhere along that part of the Labrador coast. But the mystery of the flashing light which they had seen the night before, encouraged them to row down the coast all day, alternately watching the men on the beach following them, and the summits of the high cliffs. It was late in the afternoon when they finally reached one of the most conspicuous promontories on the coast. The summit of this could be seen for miles away, and its bold, rugged face protruded far out into the sea, ending in a series of rough rocks which extended nearly two miles from the beach. These rocks gradually lessened in number and size, as they extended out from the shore, until they

disappeared under the water, where the waves rolled over them.

The rocks formed a line of surf ahead, which Louis discovered long before the others. He stood up in his boat and studied the rocks and breakers for a time. Then he finally announced:

"I'm not sure that we can pass those breakers ahead. They run out a long distance, and I don't know what we may find on the other side of the rocks. Night is coming on, and I don't like to get too far away from the shore."

"Neither do I," chimed in Frank, his late experience in the water still vivid in his mind.

"But we can land somewhere, when it gets dark," Harold suggested.

"Yes, and get nabbed by our enemies."

"I prefer trusting myself to the tender mercies of the sea," Warren replied, looking around at the calm, peaceful water.

"If I only knew what to expect on the other side of the rocky shoal, I should know what to do," Louis said contemplatively. "I should n't be surprised if there

was a deep bay around there which we could sail up and find a safe hiding place."

"Then by all means let us try to reach it before night."

"We 'll have to pull harder than we are pulling now, if we do."

"That 's easy. We can take turns, and make good time."

"All right, then. I 'll steer straight for the end of the rocks."

With this decision made, Louis turned the bow of the boat seaward, and, to those on the shore, it almost looked as if they were steering directly for the open sea, to cross it. For a long time the boat was held in this direction, approaching the rocks in a way which would bring them to the end before they actually reached the line of breakers. The deceptions at sea are often cruelly prolonged and disappointing. Even to old sailors the optical illusions are sometimes very serious matters. Louis soon discovered that his calculations were far from correct. The end of the rocky shoal was much farther from

the land than he had anticipated, and when they reached what had at first appeared to be the last rock, there were others ahead. In fact, it seemed as if their undertaking was, after all, a foolish one. The boys were nearly exhausted in their efforts, and when they finally rested on their oars, Frank asked: "How much longer must we keep this up, Louis?"

"I don't know. I had no idea it was such a long journey. The sun is sinking rapidly, too, and we should find some shelter soon."

"Is n't there a moon to-night?"

"Yes, but I don't care to steer this boat around these rocks by moonlight. The sea is too treacherous here."

"Then we must pull away until we get through to the bay?"

"Yes, that is our only hope. But wait! I think we can shorten our trip, if —"

Louis stood up in his boat and glanced ahead at the line of surf. Then, as if convincing himself of his decision, he said aloud: "Yes, I 'll do it. I 'll try to run between those rocks."

He pointed to a narrow channel which seemed to open in the surf, forming a sort of river between two of the largest rocks. The breakers dashed fiercely upon either side, and their foam extended almost entirely across the smooth piece of water that divided them. The rest of the crew looked at this narrow channel and seemed to shudder; but no voice of opposition or of dread was raised. Their eyes glanced on past the rocks to the distant shore, where the lines of the evening shadows were already creeping down from the hills. The figures of the men who had been following them all day were lost to view in the distance. It was not likely that they would attempt to climb out on the rocks to reach them, for such a feat would have required climbing and swimming ability of no mean order. They had at least temporarily left the pursuers behind, but new dangers appeared to loom up ahead, which immediately filled their minds with other thoughts.

"We must get under all the speed possible to go through the channel," Louis

said, after a long pause. "If we have no tide or current to contend with, I can steer the boat between the breakers all right; but you must all row hard. Don't look to the right or left. Simply row — pull hard all the time, and obey orders."

This is a hard task to perform under almost any circumstances, but it was peculiarly difficult with the danger threatening them of being swamped at any moment. But the boys had found by past experience that it paid them to follow the advice of Louis. His familiarity with the sea and its treacherous ways made him competent to give advice when theirs was of little value.

They pulled steadily on their rough boards, which had been shaped to resemble oars as much as possible, while Louis, with eyes directed ahead, watched for danger. As they neared the line of rocks, the roar of the breakers increased. The water grew rougher and more turbulent, and the line of retreating foam soon reached them. Still the three boys rowed, with their eyes turned toward the peaceful

sea over the stern. Only one pair of eyes faced the danger.

Suddenly Louis said sharply: "Now we're getting near the rough water, and you must not be surprised at anything I do. If I find there are strong cross-currents and eddies, I shall turn the boat around and go back before it is too late. It is important that you should row all the harder then, or we might be drawn upon the rocks by one of the eddies. So don't be surprised at anything. Row hard when I tell you, and hold your oars when I give the order to rest."

"Ay, ay, Louis, we 'll take your orders!" shouted Frank, with an attempt at cheerfulness.

In a few moments they plunged into the seething foam of the retreating breakers as they fell back after breaking their heads on the rocks. This foam often rushed in a series of small waves that swept well up to the edge of the boat; but none of the boys appeared to mind this. They were working together under orders, and nothing could daunt them.

The boat was under pretty good headway by this time, and each united pull of the oars sent her forward faster. The roll of the sea was so considerable that the craft rocked, and made rowing more difficult, but the boys tried to show their fearlessness of all danger by completely ignoring it. Even when the spray from a wave crest flung upward struck them in the face, they merely made a grimace and bent the harder to their task. Louis stood, grim and silent, in the stern before them. They could watch his face, but it was so firmly set that they could read little thereon of what was happening ahead.

When they reached the edge of the rocks, the breakers thundered all around them with such a deafening noise that they could not hear one another speak. They even doubted if they could hear an order from their captain, and they watched his face to see if he spoke. Any moment they might receive the command which, if not implicitly obeyed, might cause a catastrophe. But the order did not come. They rowed steadily onward until a wall

of foam seemed to engulf them. Back through the mist and spray they could catch glimpses of the black teeth of the rocks, huge, jagged pieces of stone that towered twenty feet above the surface of the sea. And yet their boat was apparently in calm, smooth water. At one time it seemed to be caught by strong eddies which twisted it sideways and made it shiver as if with fright. Then it plunged forward with accelerated speed, only to be brought to a sudden stop by some mighty power. Unseen, invisible forces were at work in the water underneath, but at the stern there was a steady, firm power which overcame all of these forces of evil and destruction. Louis, with the practised skill of an oarsman and sailor, made due calculations for cross-currents, and, taking advantage of each wave and receding breaker, he forced the boat along through the narrow channel with unerring ability.

Ahead of him a sea of foam and waves battled, forming a sight calculated to frighten and unnerve the hardiest of mariners. At times the narrow way was

entirely closed by the waves, and it was baffling to the eye to distinguish the line of the channel from the treacherous sides. Again the smaller rocks, half submerged by the water, would show their heads and form a barrier against which a boat could beat its ribs to pieces in a few moments. Between these ragged rocks Louis knew that he had to steer his boat, and a slight deviation either way would wreck it. He was not sure that there was a clear passage ahead between the rocks, and he had to rely upon his judgment to determine whether to go ahead or retreat.

In a short time it was too late to retreat. The boat was caught in the narrow channel with no room to turn about. Moreover, Louis soon found that there was a strong current setting through the passage which caught his boat and carried it along with great speed. They were now openly committed to the inevitable. They were either to pass the rocks safely, or be dashed to pieces upon them.

It was no longer necessary for the oarsmen to row. The boat was rushing along

at a speed which required all the skill of the helmsman to steer straight. Calling out in a loud voice, Louis ordered them to cease rowing. The oars immediately dropped on the half stroke, and were raised in the air. For the first time the rowers breathed easily, and then half turned their heads to get a glimpse of the sea ahead.

It was not a pleasant view which met their gaze, and they turned a little pale at the first sight; but, when they saw the boat speeding past the rocks and breakers, their confidence in Louis returned to reassure them. They felt that he would steer the boat through the danger, if any human being possibly could.

The moment of fearful danger was really of short duration, although to the boys it seemed an age while their boat was passing through the maëlstrom of seething and eddying waters. They shot past the big black rocks with great swiftness, the keel of their boat grating on some rough edge, and then they hurried on to another frowning boulder, standing knee-deep in the water. The wall of foam and break-

ing billows encompassed them, and the roar of the turbulent waters became deafening. Yet through it all the boat continued steadily on its course, and in a few moments it shot out into comparatively quiet water. It took some moments for the boys to realize that they were clear of the rocks and reef, and they remained idly passive, watching the trap from which they had escaped. Frank finally exclaimed, jumping to his feet, and pointing ahead: "Look! Look! We 're at the mouth of a river."

"Yes, and the tide is carrying us up it," replied Louis, who had noticed this before any of the others. "That is why the current took us through that channel so rapidly. I think now we can reach land before dark."

"And why not land on the opposite side of the river?" asked Warren.

"Yes, and the men will not be able to follow us," shouted Harold, gleefully. "They cannot cross this river unless they have a boat."

"But they may have a raft of logs,"

suggested Frank. "I don't think they would stay up here so long and have no means of crossing the river."

"You 're right, Frank," Louis responded. "I think we 'll have a visit from them, sooner or later, even if we do land across the river."

"But they 've lost sight of us now," said Warren. "Then why not stay away from the shore until dark? They won't see us land then, and we can at least have another night of peace."

"That 's a good suggestion," responded Louis, "and we 'll act upon it. I think we could, in an emergency, almost make a landing on these rocks on the lee shore. I certainly shall make an effort."

CHAPTER XX

BUT the attempt to make a brief landing on the rocks proved almost disastrous, and the boys, after a few futile efforts, abandoned the plan entirely, Louis advising them not to run any farther risks on such a dangerous rock-bound coast. The swell of the waves and the eddying currents caught the boat at times with great force, and almost jammed it between the rocks. Finally Louis said:

"Never mind. It's nearly dusk now, and before we reach the land it will be too dark for the men to follow us. We will row up close to this shore, as if we intended to land on this side, and then cut directly across when we reach the opposite point."

The dusk of early evening descended swiftly and surely, and as the moon did not rise for an hour after sundown, the ocean was clothed in darkness for some

time. Under this cloud of gloom, the boys finally paddled their boat across the river, and touched the beach not far from the mouth of the river or basin. When they landed they pulled the boat up on the beach and concealed it behind some rocks, intending to keep it there until the moon rose.

"Then," suggested Louis, "we might row up the river some distance, and land where the woods come close down to the water. We can find some place to hide in the woods where the men would have a hard time to find us. Meanwhile, I want to find something to eat."

Digging in the sands for shellfish, they were soon oblivious to all the dangers of their surroundings, and not until their appetite was satisfied did they think of continuing their journey.

"I 'd like some broiled fish for supper," said Frank, ruefully. "But it would n't be safe to light a fire, I suppose."

"No, not to-night. But we 'll find a cave somewhere to-morrow, where we can build a fire and not attract attention, especially

at night-time. Smoke does n't betray you at night, but bright flames do."

The river which they had entered could be studied better an hour later, when the moon rose. The promontory which they had rounded with so much difficulty could be seen in all its ruggedness, jutting far out into the river, and in the moonlight it had a wild beauty which attracted the boys. The river or basin cut into one side of it, and disappeared between two wooded shores which sloped gradually down to the beach. The tide rushed into this basin with great swiftness, and when the flood was reached, the mouth of the stream was fully two miles wide. The rise and fall of the tide seemed fully twenty feet, so that, at one time, few rocks were visible above the surface of the water, and again shoals of small and large rocks stretched for miles in all directions.

The moon was full, and had risen above the sea in all its glory, before the boys decided to look for another anchorage place. By that time the tide was nearing the

flood, and they could paddle their boat more easily along the shore without inviting any risk of foundering on some hidden rock. They were about to shove off from the beach to explore the wooded banks of the river, when suddenly their attention was attracted by a sight which made them gasp with wonder.

Almost directly over their heads, just across the mouth of the river, flashed out the mysterious light which they had noticed the night before several miles up the coast. They were so near the light that it seemed as if its rays would reach them. They slowly flashed out over the sea, and then, as the light revolved, searched every part of the river and the wooded shore. The boys dodged as the rays reached them, but instantly they smiled at their action.

"The lighthouse is on the promontory we rounded to-day," gasped Frank, finally, after the four had stared in amazement at the light.

"Why did n't we see the tower then?" asked Warren, incredulously.

"We must have been too much interested in escaping the rocks to look in the right direction," added Harold.

"No, I don't think it's that," Louis replied slowly.

"What then? What is it, Louis?"

"I don't know," frankly and bluntly answered the boy. "It's all a mystery to me, but I don't think it's a lighthouse. However, we must investigate."

"To-night? How can we reach it without being discovered by the men? We don't want to fall into their clutches again."

"No, we won't go to-night unless —"

Louis hesitated for so long that his companions grew impatient.

"I don't like to say it," he finally added, in reply to their importunate questions, "but I believe the men we met on the beach were wreckers, and that this is a false beacon light. I remember now hearing, some time ago, of a light being placed somewhere along this part of the coast as a guide to the sailors who might get lost up north late in the season. It was a

sort of way-station for them, provided with food and clothing by the government. When they saw the light, they knew it was a safe anchorage place, and the ship could find shelter behind the promontory in times of trouble. But the station was abandoned after a while. I don't know why; but not every sea-captain knew of this, and ships in trouble would look for it long after it was given up. Then there were rumors abroad that false lights were seen on the coast, and that many ships were lured on the rocks to their destruction. Several wrecks occurred in that way, and escaping sailors told of the hardships they had received, and of wreckers who had robbed them of all they possessed. Of course, such stories are easily started and hard to prove. It 's a part of the world that few trading ships ever reach, and wreckers might work here for years without being caught. They would probably lure two or three ships a year on the rocks, and they could reap a good harvest in that way."

"Then you think the stories are, after

all, true, and that we have fallen among this nest of wreckers?" asked Frank, indignantly.

"I am inclined to think so, Frank, but I may be mistaken."

"Then we should do something to stop their work."

"Yes, it is that I was thinking of when you first interrupted me. I was going to say that we would n't investigate until morning, unless we should, by luck, see a ship's lights along the coast."

"If we did, we would try to prevent her approaching the coast?"

"Yes, at the risk of our lives," replied Louis, sharply. "There is no more treacherous harbor in the world than this little basin. Why, at any tide, it is so full of rocks that a ship would go on them before she could come to anchor. It is an ideal place for wreckers to ply their trade. In the first place, that long ledge of rocks extends so far out to sea that any ship coming within five miles of the light, on a dark night, would strike a rock and pound herself to pieces before morning. Then

this tide would wash the wreckage in the river, and the wreckers could pick it up at their leisure. Just think of the *Northern Star*, for instance, coming in here! If father saw this light, he would approach the coast to investigate it. He would be looking for us, and, thinking it was our signal, he would run too close for safety."

"I think we should make an effort to destroy the light as soon as possible, then," Warren said. "I for one am ready at any time to make a raid on it."

"We'll make an exploring expedition around it to-morrow, when it is light," Louis replied. "We must first find a good anchorage for our boat, so the men can't find it. Then we can take to the woods, and hide from them at will. We shall stay this side of the river for the present, and I hope they will stay on their side. But now, come, we must make a moonlight start to explore our surroundings."

They pushed the boat off from the shore, and floated quietly up the stream. By keeping close to the bank, they were so

hidden from view by the shadows of the woods and rocks that no one could see them fifty feet away, but they had a clear view of the river and opposite bank. As they proceeded slowly up the stream, they caught different points of view of the revolving light. It was located on the highest point of the headland; and in the moonlight, it appeared like a tall, slender spindle with a rude sort of light surmounting it. At one point on the river, the view was so favorable that they stopped the boat for ten minutes, while they made a careful study of the situation.

"It certainly revolves," said Frank, after a long pause. "Would wreckers be apt to have a light that could move?"

"It doesn't seem probable," Louis responded, "but, on the other hand, it is a crude sort of an affair. I never saw a light like it before. If it's a home-made affair, it is ingeniously built."

"Why not land on that side of the river and make an exploration to-night?" asked Warren, feeling the spirit of adventure stirring within him. "We can't do any

more than get caught, and I don't think that will happen, if we are careful."

"I'm in favor of finding a hiding-place first," Louis replied. "Then we might hunt up the light to-morrow night. We could n't do it in the day-time, if the men are around, without falling into an ambush. They could watch us land, and then, when we left the boat, capture it."

"Still, I'm in the mood to go up to the top of the hill and find out the mystery of the strange light," Warren persisted.

"How about the rest of you? If you all agree to Warren's proposition, I'm willing. I must confess I'm interested too, and anxious to find out the meaning of the light."

"Would we run any danger in rowing across the river and landing?" Frank asked, looking cautiously across the moonlit stream.

"If we crossed here, I think we would," Louis answered; "but not if we row up beyond the turn, and then get into the shadow of the opposite bank. No one could see us then, and we could row silently down the stream to the point nearest the hill."

"Then I'm in favor of making the experiment to-night."

"And you, Harold?"

"Yes, I'm with you. I vote to move upon the enemy's camp right away."

"Then pull up stream until we get around the bend, and we'll cross over; but, mind, we must move silently, and not talk when we get near the opposite bank."

With silent strokes they pulled the craft along through the water, keeping close in the shadow of the bank. A high bluff jutted out into the river, forming a sharp bend for the stream. When they had passed around this, the ocean and the light were entirely cut off from view.

"Now we can cross in safety, and then make the return trip on the other side," Louis said.

Within a few moments the boat was gliding softly through the water, hugging the opposite shore, approaching nearer and nearer to what the boys termed their enemy's country. Just where the men were located, they had no way to find out, but they were sure that they would be on

a constant lookout for them. They were not a class of men to be baffled and outwitted without harboring a spirit of revenge. It might go hard with the boys if they should fall into the hands of the strange inhabitants of the coast after their recent experience with them.

CHAPTER XXI

THE bank which they skirted rose rather precipitously from the water's edge, and heavy trees hung far out over the surface of the stream, forming a protection from the moon's rays which served the boys a good turn. Back in the woods all was dark, so black, in fact, that the eye could distinguish nothing. Even the trunks of the trees were lost in this gloom. It was difficult for the boys to make out landmarks to guide them in their journey. Several times they had to stop the boat, while Louis vainly sought to catch a glimpse of the light on the top of the hill. The branches from the overhanging trees would sometimes strike them on the head and inflict a painful sting. Throughout it all, the silence of the woods and sea brooded over the place. Occasionally a bird or marauding animal would steal out of the bush and splash in the water, or

some creature, caught by an enemy, would shriek out its dying gasp that would echo on the night air.

There was no chance to encourage one another with words, for the order was given that not a word should be spoken above a whisper. In the darkness, the boys listened and rowed, using every sense to catch a faint alarm. For a long time they proceeded in this fashion down the stream, Louis in the bow of the boat, directing them in whispers or by signs. Once he grasped the overhanging branches of a tree and brought the boat to a sudden stop, which alarmed the rest of the occupants. For five minutes they waited in breathless silence. Then he said, in a low whisper:

"Row on again. I thought I heard some one in the woods, but it must have been an animal."

After that their courage was not quite so fine, and their spirit for adventure not quite so active. They were nearing dangers which, at a distance, seemed less positive. However, they were one and all

committed to the midnight expedition, and not one was willing to back out.

When they had reached a point nearly opposite the place where they had first landed, Louis swung the boat into the shore with a sharp pull on one of the convenient branches overhead. The next moment the bow of the boat bumped against the bank. Louis, holding securely to the branch, tied the rope to the roots of the tree, and quietly stepped ashore, feeling his way among the branches. Slowly and silently the others followed, each keeping within touching distance of the one preceding. The boat drifted a few feet out, to the full length of the painter, and then swung idly against the branches.

Working their way through the woods, the boys finally reached higher ground, where the trees were fewer and the underbrush very sparse. The light of the moon made their pathway easier to follow, and sometimes open spaces would occur which enabled them to study their surroundings for long distances around.

Nothing occurred to alarm them, and,

when they reached the summit of the hill, they looked down upon the river, which they had so recently left, and across it to the opposite bank. The ocean beyond was bright and silvery in the moonlight. A bright stream of light from the beacon on the top of the cliff was shining out upon the water. They had landed close to the light, and, from their vantage point, they could now see that it was a crude affair built by some rough mechanics. It was, in reality, a huge barrel with two panels cut out of the sides and a light placed inside. When the barrel revolved, the light flashed from the open panels as the rays from an ordinary revolving lighthouse.

"What moves it?" asked Harold, in a whisper, as they watched the queer apparatus revolving before their eyes.

"Somebody must be up there turning it," Frank replied.

The barrel was mounted on the top of a huge tree-trunk, which had been cut off even at the top. A rude sort of platform had been built on the top, so that a person

could walk around the light. As the boys approached nearer to the queer light, they could hear the creaking of the barrel as it turned around. All else was quiet and motionless. There was no sign of any human being in the vicinity, but the light continued to revolve slowly and rhythmically.

After approaching within a hundred feet of the light, Louis signalled to withdraw, and at a safe distance he said:

"There must be some one in charge of the light, and we don't want to attract his attention. We must retreat now, and wait for some other time before investigating closer. I imagine that, in the daytime, the place is deserted, and we can then steal up here and study the whole thing."

None of the boys cared to run any risk, and they willingly followed Louis back to their boat. Convinced that the men were up at the light, they walked more carelessly down the embankment, and even ventured at times to speak above a whisper. But they were rudely awakened to the foolish-

ness of this course. Warren suddenly stopped, and said :

" Listen ! Was n't that a paddle in the water ? It sounded as if some one was rowing."

All four waited patiently, and, in a few moments, they could hear the distinct splash of oars in the water not far from them. They looked at one another blankly. There could be no question now about the presence of others near their boat.

" They watched us land, and have stolen our boat," whispered Frank.

The boys listened for a repetition of the sound in the water. All was dark near the edge of the bank, and they could see nothing moving on the surface of the river.

" We have the advantage, if they land again," Louis said softly. " If they leave the boat a minute, we can recover it with a rush."

" It would have been better for us if we had stayed across the river until daylight," Warren murmured regretfully.

" So Louis thought," Harold answered,

"but, as usual, we all wanted our way against his better judgment."

Louis interrupted this whispered conversation by beckoning them to follow him, as he took up the line of march once more. Slowly they approached closer to the river's edge, working their way through the bushes and trees until, suddenly, there was a splash directly in front of them. Every boy grasped his stick, which he had carried along for an emergency, and stood on the defensive.

But the alarm was quickly explained. In stepping forward too eagerly, Frank had plunged a foot into a soft hole near the edge of the river, and for a moment it seemed to him as if he would sink out of sight. Louis had grasped him by the shoulder in the darkness, and pulled him back to a place of safety.

The noise of the fall had, however, attracted the attention of those paddling on the river, for the splashing of the oars instantly ceased. Realizing their danger of discovery, Louis cautioned them to be quiet, and the boys remained perfectly motion-

less for a long time. Apparently the paddlers on the river were finally convinced that the noise on the shore was caused by some prowling night animal, and they once more took up their work of rowing. When the splash of the oars was distinctly heard again, the four crouching boys breathed easier.

While they waited thus in the bushes, a silent shadow seemed suddenly to drift before them. It came so silently and mysteriously that its uncanny effect made them shiver. It was hardly a shadow, or the reflection of a cloud, but a flitting of a dark body that made them blink in awe. They held their breath for an instant, and then, with a sigh of relief, they saw the reason for their fear.

Directly in front of them, not a dozen yards away, moved, silently and mysteriously, a craft carrying several people. The shadows cast by the trees on the bank had hidden the boat and its occupants from view, and, even now, it shrouded them in such a gloom that they were hardly visible. It was more like the substance of a

dream than the reality which swept before them. If they had not heard the soft splashing of the paddles, the sudden appearance of the ghostly craft would have stirred their fear and superstition. As it was, after the first startled impression of terror, they were jubilant at the sight, for the enemy was now in view, and the boat which they were paddling was not the one the boys had saved from the iceberg. It was too long and clumsy for their stanch little boat. Even in the darkness they could see that it was a clumsy, hand-made affair, half boat and half raft.

The boat swept silently along the shore, and finally disappeared from view in the gloom. The watchers waited patiently until all was quiet again. Then Frank stirred in his cramped position in the mud and water, and said:

"It 's not our boat after all."

"No, they have n't found it," Louis responded. "But they 're keeping a close watch along this shore for us. They expect us to land somewhere along here."

"Then let us get across the stream and hide somewhere before morning."

"They 'll soon be hunting on that side too for us."

"You think it safer to stay here?"

"I 'm not so sure, but we certainly want to get back to our boat as soon as possible. I think we could row faster than they could with that tub. In the event of a chase, we could show them how they pull an oar at old Sheffield."

"You 're right there, Louis. We 'll set them a stroke that will make them open their eyes."

When the silence of the place indicated perfect safety, the boys stole forth from their hiding-place, and Louis slowly led them back to their moored boat. By means of two large trees, placed at a certain angle with the light from the top of the cliff, he was able to find the boat in the darkness, and in a few minutes they were seated in the craft, ready to push out into the stream. But before the rope could be unloosened, Warren suddenly exclaimed:

"Look! They 're crossing the stream!"

A hundred yards up the river, the boat with the four men in it was pushing out from the shadows along the bank to the moonlit path of the water. It stood out so plainly and distinctly in the moonlight that the boys could count the figures paddling. It was so evident that they had exhausted their search on this side of the river, and were intent upon exploring the opposite bank, that Louis said, with a smile:

"I think for the present this is the safest side for us."

The boat with the men in it was headed up stream, instead of down, and consequently the boys decided to follow it under the shadow of their embankment. They did this slowly and noiselessly, paddling and listening by turns, as they proceeded.

For a full hour they worked their way up stream, passing far beyond the bend which they had so recently used as a screen to cover their flank movement in crossing the river. Nothing was heard or seen of the other boat. Covered from view by the shadow of the trees opposite,

the craft on the other side moved either abreast or ahead or behind them. It did not appear again in the path of the moon. There was enough uncertainty in this to cause a little anxiety. The boys grew impatient, hoping to see the craft appear again to let them know where to look for it.

Matters proceeded in this way for some time. Louis then said: "We must find some hiding-place before morning. They could easily discover us here in broad daylight."

"What do you propose to do?"

"Either land and pull our boat up among the bushes to hide it, or find some little creek or ditch to row up."

"Why not go up the stream as far as we can, and then hide in the woods?"

"We 're several miles away from the ocean now, I judge, and I don't care to get too far away."

"Then here 's just what we want!" Frank exclaimed. "Here 's a little creek that runs somewhere."

The boat pushed its nose into a narrow

ditch, and with one accord the boys paddled up it. A few hundred yards brought them to a small brook of fresh water which fed the ditch, and gave an excuse for its existence. On every side dense growths of trees and underbrush made their hiding-place apparently secure.

"Here we camp for the night," Louis whispered. "We 'll pull the boat up into the bushes."

CHAPTER XXII

THEY needed no sentinel on duty. The shadows of the night, and the intense gloom of the woods, were their surest and best protection. Notwithstanding the noises of the wild animals and few night birds, they slept soundly, not once dreaming of the dangers which might lurk near them. The leaves and moss were soft and comfortable, and the overturned boat formed a canopy to protect them from the night dew and fogs.

It was bright morning when they stretched their limbs and lay for a few moments comfortably lazy in the cool air. The charm of a perfect day was dawning upon them. The sun's rays were already filtering through the foliage to light up the moss and beds of flowers around them. Frank first spoke, saying, in a low voice:

"Let 's take a vote to see who goes to the brook to bring back a drink for all. I hear it gurgling, and it makes me thirsty."

"For that matter, I 'll get the water, if Frank will cook the breakfast," Warren replied.

"I agree to it, if Harold will first find the breakfast to cook."

"And I will accept my portion of labor, if Louis will tell me where to find the breakfast."

"Now it 's up to you, Louis. What shall we do? Speak, and your servants are ready to obey. I think we 'll have a change of diet, for there are no clams to dig up here."

Louis shook his head.

"No, nor anything else that will satisfy a good appetite, unless it be some berries or a wild bird. Now if we had a gun."

"We have n't; so we 'll set traps for the birds. I used to know how to make a snare. I 'll try my hand at it now. But somebody first bring me a drink of that brook water."

"I can't fulfil my bargain until the rest of you do yours," Warren said. "But I'm thirsty, and I'll taste of the water to see how good it is."

He climbed through the bushes and walked down toward the spring which fed the brook with its clear, pellucid water. The tinkling of the brook made a pleasant sound for a thirsty mortal, and Warren was soon kneeling by its side, heartily drinking of its cooling water. But a moment later he hurried back to the camp with a white, scared face. Stepping quietly among the bushes, he whispered:

"We've stumbled right on the drinking-place of our enemies. Their footprints are all around the spring, and there are old battered tin cans and bottles in the brook. Some of the tracks are fresh enough to have been made this morning."

Louis and Frank were on their feet in an instant. This piece of news was very unwelcome. Instead of sleeping a mile or two away from the men, they had, without knowing it, selected a camp close to them. There was one thought upper-

most in their minds. They would leave the spot as quickly as they could. It was still early morning, and their opportunity to escape might not come again.

"We must get out of here at once," Louis said. "We 'll pull up stakes before the men are awake."

He stooped as if to take hold of the boat to lift it from its position in the bushes; but a restraining hand held him from his purpose. Frank was pointing excitedly toward the brook. From out of the woods the head of a man appeared. At first they could see only a part of the hatless head, and then gradually the face and shoulders loomed up. It was the leader of the men who had followed them into the water, the one who had swum with such powerful strokes through the surf to help his comrade to capture the boat from the boys.

This unwelcome sight brought a spasm of fear to the hearts of the boys; but as they were still undiscovered, they crouched silently in their hiding-place. The burly man walked down to the brook, and, kneel-

ing, took a long drink. Then filling a big can which he carried by a handle made of rope, he turned and retraced his steps. When the last echo of these was heard in the distance, Louis signalled to raise the boat. The four stooped over and picked the craft up in their arms, and walked as carefully toward the ditch as possible. The creaking of every twig and the rattling of each stone were magnified in their minds a thousandfold, and they expected every moment to hear the men rushing down upon them.

But they reached the water in time, and launched their light craft. Then, for just a moment, they waited and listened. There was no unusual sound heard, and, with a sigh of relief, they pushed down the stream and were soon floating on the river again.

"To think I did n't get a taste of that water after all," Frank whispered dismally, as the tension of their nerves was relieved.

Warren laughed softly. "It was fine water," he said, smacking his lips. "I 've

never tasted better. I wish we had a bucketful here, so you could have some, Frank."

"I'll have some yet," Frank growled, "if you live up to your contract. Louis will show Harold where to find some breakfast, and then we must have some fresh water to cook it in. You've agreed to get the water."

"Yes — some water," replied Warren, "but not necessarily the water from that brook."

"That was a part of the bargain, and we'll hold you to it."

Warren looked dubiously across the stretch of river toward the place where they had so nearly run into the very men they had been trying to avoid. Then, shaking his head, he answered:

"We'll put it to a vote. I'll go back to the brook if the majority say so. I'm not sneaking away from my duty."

"Suppose we leave the matter open for the present, and turn to something more pressing," Louis interrupted. "What shall we do for a hiding-place where we can

camp in safety, and even make a fire at night which will not be seen?"

"Yes, that's the question! What shall we do?" exclaimed Frank, solemnly, forgetting the controversy with Warren.

There was no answer to this. They floated up the stream with the tide, in anxious uncertainty. Then, as they rounded another bend in the river, a new feature of their experiences was unfolded to them, which, later, brought an answer to their query.

A mile ahead a precipitous bluff seemed to cut off farther progress in that direction. The rocks came straight down to the water's edge, and seemed to offer an effectual barrier to the river's farther progress. But as the boat drifted on, the boys could see that, while the river was split and flowed in two directions by reason of this mountain of rocks, there were great caverns opening in the side into which emptied a part of the stream.

Many of these caverns had been worn out of the rocks by the action of the water through countless centuries of activity.

Others had apparently been formed by geological disturbances of the earth in prehistoric times. A few were carved so curiously that it was hard to believe that the hand of man had nothing to do with their formation.

The main or central one particularly attracted the attention of the astonished navigators. It was broader than a ship, and higher at the mouth than the tallest mast of a ship. It was formed into a great dome, whose interior was lost into the darkness, where the sunlight never appeared. Ragged pieces of rocks hung suspended from the ceiling, as if ready to fall at any moment; but they had in all probability been hanging there for ages. Stunted tree growths and sparse vegetable specimens clung in a precarious way to a few inches of soil collected in the rocky clefts.

When the boat drifted down upon these strange caverns, the boys forgot the causes which had driven them to explore such an out-of-the-way corner of the world. They were gazing upon some of the most sublime

creations of nature, and few human eyes had ever before seen them. For some time they drifted with the tide. Then, as the boat appeared unable to decide which way to go, feeling the impulse of two distinct currents, Louis exclaimed:

"We'll row into the cavern, and try to find a hiding-place. Come, that is an answer to our question."

The grandeur of the queer formation of nature increased the wonder of the young navigators as they drew so near that they could study the small plants growing above the rocks. They plied their oars, and the boat was guided toward the middle opening in the rocks. The roof seemed so high here that it appeared like the mammoth mouth of some huge antediluvian monster. The light gradually receded from view inside of the cavern, and when the boat drifted under the arched dome, the boys stopped rowing, a nameless fear suddenly seizing them. This fear was voiced by Frank, who asked, in a fearsome tone:

"Suppose the tide drifts us in here and we can't return?"

Louis answered the question quickly: "There is no danger. The current is very slight, and besides, when the tide falls, the current must carry us back."

With this reassurance, they permitted their boat to drift under the arched dome and penetrate the gloom beyond. As their eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, the cavern did not appear so gloomy. They could study the outlines of the rocks overhead, and even watch the flashes of fishes leaping out of the water around them. The silvery light from the outside world, shining through the opening, formed strange, fantastic pictures around. The glint of this light on the waves was reflected in a million bright bars of gold and silver.

"How far shall we go?" asked Warren, in a low voice.

"Only far enough to find a hiding-place," Louis answered. "Then we can explore the cave some other day. I wonder how far it goes?"

"How can we hide in a place like this?" asked Harold. "We can't live in our boat forever."

"No, we must find a landing-place. I hoped we could find some rock or shelf in here where we could camp in safety."

"Don't you suppose the men would look for us in here?"

"They might, but in the darkness they would have some trouble finding us. It would be a case of blind-man's-buff, and we could hide as fast as they could discover us."

The vaulted cavern gradually narrowed, and the roof sloped downward until a voice spoken above a whisper echoed like a shout in a megaphone. Frank said laughingly: "Well, we can't cut up here much, or we'll expose our hiding-place to every one. Even Warren's breathing sounds like the snore of a man having a bad dream."

Louis, who had been trying hard to penetrate the gloom ahead, suddenly said: "Wait! Back water on your oars, and let me paddle her up on this side."

The boys, obedient to his orders, brought the boat slowly up toward the shelving wall of rock. In a few moments Louis could

touch the wall with his hand. Then slowly working the boat along, he followed the rocks until he came to a sharp angle in them. There seemed to be a slight gleam of light ahead, and, following this, he soon came upon a secluded part of the cavern, lighted by a small opening from above. They could not see the crevice through which the faint light of day filtered, but it had the effect of producing a semi-gloom in the cavern which enabled the boys to see their surroundings. Louis exclaimed a little excitedly:

"Here we are! Here's an ideal place for our hiding camp!"

Directly ahead, almost under the rays of light, there was a rocky shelf which ran out into the water, forming a floor or landing, which offered every facility for camping.

"Eureka! That's the place!" shouted Warren and Harold.

"Don't shout it to the men," warned Frank. "They'll find us quick enough."

They were so pleased with their camping-place that they gave little heed to any

danger that might result from their noisy talk, and, with an unnecessary amount of haste, they tumbled out upon the rocky shelf and anchored their boat.

It was a better hiding-place than they had supposed. The rock formed a perfectly level floor for them, and the angle in the wall shut off all views from the opening. The light overhead was bright enough to enable them to see what they were doing, and, as Frank remarked, they could even see to skin an eel, although he doubted about threading a needle.

"We can certainly build a fire here to cook by," Warren said, "and no one could see the smoke or flames."

"It 's a little chilly here," Harold remarked, shivering. "I wish we had a fire now."

"Yes, it is cold, and there are chunks of ice all around us," answered Louis. "Evidently the ice in here never melts. Some of the cakes have drifted in here from the ocean in winter, and they stay here until another winter."

"Well, then, we won't need any ice-box

to keep our things cold," Frank replied. "We 'll have ice-water, too, in plenty. There are some advantages even in being cast adrift in this out-of-the-way corner of the world."

"Yes, we might be much worse off. But now for breakfast! I 'm nearly famished, and we must go hunting for something to eat."

"Yes, and for wood for a fire."

CHAPTER XXIII

THEY spent the rest of the day in fitting up their camp, stealing out from the mouth of the cavern at intervals to pick up wood and to find berries, wild fruits, game, and fish. They carried boat-loads of pine boughs and hemlock bushes back with them. These they piled up on the rocky floor for beds. They made soft and aromatic beds which were a luxury to recline upon. With plenty of dry wood collected, they started a fire, and then rowed outside of the cave to see if either the smoke or reflection of the flames could attract the attention of the men. The smoke evidently found its way up the natural chimney through which the light streamed, and then gradually lost itself in the distance. The angle in the rocky wall was so sharp and deep that no reflection of the flames on the water could be seen.

"We are safe for the present," Louis decided, after a thorough investigation on all sides. "I think we can sleep to-night in safety."

"I for one shall enjoy it," Warren said. "After discovering this morning that we had been sleeping close to the men last night, I felt that I would n't want to close my eyes again for a week. Now we have a pretty good supply of food. What a variety, too! Here 's fish, quail, duck, mountain blackberries, dewberries, and something else which has no name, and which we don't dare eat, although I know it 's delicious."

"You prove it, and we 'll accept your word for it," Frank added. "If it kills you, Warren, we 'll give you a decent sailor's burial."

"Not in this dark water," shuddered Warren. "I 'd rather have a land burial."

"Oh, for that matter you can have your choice! We 'll take you up to the top of the mountain at night-time and cut out a sarcophagus for you."

There was one thing they lacked.

There was no fresh water near their camping-place. The stream of water around them was too salty to use except for cooking purposes. They explored the country in all directions for fresh water, and toward night it looked very much as if they would have to return to the spring near which they had slept the previous night. Although this was located close to the camping-place of the strange wreckers, they would make the effort to secure some of its cooling water under the cover of darkness, if no other spring or stream presented itself. But the necessity of running this risk was dispensed with toward night, when, by mere accident, they discovered the trickling waters of a rivulet which flowed through the rocks into the cavern. They were thus enabled to get their supply of drinking water without venturing outside of their dark hiding-place.

"If we only had a back entrance to our home now, we should be all right," Frank remarked, after the discovery of the water. "The men will in time watch the entrance and find us."

"But we are not going to stay here forever," Warren replied.

"No, indeed, I want to get back to the ocean and find a ship," Harold quickly added.

"A ship may appear almost any time, and down here in this cavern we could never see it to signal for help."

"I've been thinking seriously of that myself," Louis said slowly. "We must find some way out of the difficulty, even if we have to row down the coast and get beyond the reach of these men."

"That is what I propose we do in a few days."

"It is all that we can do. But first I should like to make another trip up to the false beacon light and smash it."

"Yes, I'm anxious to do something of that kind, too," responded Louis, with a grim smile. "I'm thinking the *Northern Star* will be cruising around in these waters for a time, and I should hate to see her lost on these rocks."

The suggestion of such a possibility brought sudden silence on the group.

They had thought little of the vessel they had so recently left, so great had been the excitement of their adventures; but this remark recalled vividly the past. Harold heaved a sigh, and said, after a long pause: "I wonder where the schooner is now!"

"Somewhere not far from here," Louis answered. "I know that."

"Your father must be worried to death," Frank replied. "In our case, our folks know nothing about our being lost, but Captain Pendleton must feel the burden heavily."

"Yes, he is suffering more than we are, for we know that we are safe at present, while he is in doubt."

That night the boys spent in camp. Inside of their cave they built a roaring fire which cast a light around on the rocks, making everything as bright as day. Far across the waters the flicker of the camp-fire shone. Within its magic circle the boys clustered, watching the play of the flames and the shadows on the rocks, and telling over again, with new zest, the stories of their school pranks. They had

finished a supper of fish, duck, and fruit, which, though not as varied a diet as they might have selected at home, offered them all the nourishment and satisfaction that tired limbs and bodies desired.

There was no time with them. The sun had long since disappeared, and the moon was riding high in the heavens, but it was all the same in the dark recesses of the cave. In the glow of the morning sun, darkness would still hover around them, and they would scarcely know of the change from night to day. It was in reality long past midnight, when they finally threw themselves down in the glow of the fire, and slept. The chill of the cave was intense at night, but the fire warmed their bodies, so they slept with comparative comfort. Twice in the night Louis roused himself and fed the fire with more fuel. He listened intently for any alarming noise, and walked around the narrow circle of their rocky camp, to see if all was well. Then he turned in again, and slept with the others.

It was a night of sound and refreshing

rest to the boys. A sense of security possessed them, which enabled them to roll over, time and again, to renew their half-disturbed slumber. Even when they were finally roused by the declining of their fire, they lazily lolled around and fed the fire with sticks. Breakfast was served, somewhere between morning and noon, but no one knew exactly when.

Finally they were all astir and ready for the day's work. Frank asked, tossing the last stick into the fire: "Well, what shall we do to-day? Explore this cave, or go out and hunt up our men?"

"We'll first lay in a new stock of firewood and provisions," Louis responded. "Did n't you just use the last stick?"

"That 's work, and I know we 've got to do it; but what are we going to do in the way of pleasure?"

"If we get back in time, we'll explore the cave, but first let 's get through with the work."

"Oh, you 're a regular slave-driver, Louis," protested Frank. "Why not have some fun, and then do the work later?"

"Fine advice from you, Frank! How would it apply, next winter, to your football team? I shall remember it."

"This isn't winter time; it's vacation," promptly came the reply. Nevertheless, Frank was one of the most eager in the pursuit of firewood and game an hour later, when they pushed out of the cave, and hunted around in the woods and waters for their necessities. The sun was past the noon meridian before they emerged from the cavern, and they were astonished at the lateness of the day. There would be little time left for exploring the cave, if they were to gather their food and fuel before sundown. The days were short, and the nights long; and there were few hours left them to work in.

Game and fish both appeared wary and hard to find that day. Even the dry wood seemed distributed in places hard to discover, and they spent hours in loading their boat. Frank and Warren were on one of the highest points of the cliffs toward sunset, when the latter suddenly dropped

his burden of berries, and some wild fruit he had been gathering in the woods.

"Frank! Frank!" he shouted in his eagerness.

"What 's the matter?" exclaimed Frank, emerging from a clump of trees. "Do you want to attract the attention of the men across the river? You 'll do it, shouting like that!"

"Come, and look here!" replied Warren, not noticing Frank's words of warning. He was dancing up and down, and waving his hands frantically over his head.

"Well, of all antics I ever saw—" began Frank, and then he, too, started a war-dance.

His eyes had suddenly caught sight of the ocean from a commanding position on the summit of the hill, and he instantly saw what had aroused Warren's enthusiasm. There in the distance was the clear outline of a sail, sparkling in the sunlight, and pointed directly toward the coast. It was a large three-masted schooner with every sail set. There was a strong breeze blowing, and the boat was easily making ten or twelve knots an hour.

The two boys executed a war-dance on the rocky cliff, and acted otherwise as if they had suddenly been bereft of their senses.

"It 's the *Northern Star*," said Frank, finally, gasping for breath.

"I knew it when I first clapped eyes on her," Warren answered positively. "I 'd know her a thousand miles away."

"It would n't matter whether it was or not," Frank said. "So long as it is a ship, we can get on board of her."

"But will she come up to take us away?"

"I don't know. But we 'll signal her. Run down and tell Louis and Harold. I 'll climb a tree, and put up a signal. No, I 'll stay here, and wave my hat until they come to rescue us."

In the eyes of the boys there was no possible excuse for the ship not sailing directly toward the coast and rescuing them from their uncomfortable exile; but when Warren started down the cliff to summon Louis and Harold, Frank nearly tumbled off his tree at the sight of the ship deliberately turning her nose around, and pointing

toward the sea again. Then he realized that she had merely been sailing toward the coast on a long tack, and that she would not approach it again until she had covered many miles. The tears of chagrin and disappointment started in his eyes. To be so near rescue, and then have it postponed or thwarted entirely was too much for him. His spirits underwent a change which left him depressed and discouraged.

Ten minutes later, the rest of the boys found him seated at the foot of the tree from whose branches he was going to signal the passing ship.

"It's no good," he said dolefully. "They turned out to sea before I could attract their attention. We're doomed to stay here forever, I guess. If we only had a gun now, we might attract their attention."

"It's the *Northern Star*, Louis, and I discovered her first," Warren said, hardly yet conscious of the disappointment that overwhelmed Frank.

"No, that isn't the *Northern Star*," Louis replied emphatically.

"But I say it is, and Frank does, too," Warren answered sharply.

"I guess I know the *Northern Star* by this time. That 's some big sealer up here, and she 's hunting around for ice floes, that may have seals on them. She may cruise back and forth here for a week."

"Then all hope has n't gone yet," Frank remarked, brightening up and glancing inquiringly toward the speaker.

"No, our hope is good until the summer is over. Then, if we are not picked up, it will go hard with us. The winter up here is a pretty tough proposition. I don't know whether we could live through it or not."

"But that is a long time off yet."

"Not so many weeks as you think. Winter comes here early, and summer goes like the snuff of a candle. Some day the sun will darken, and the snow clouds will gather in the skies, and the mercury will drop ten degrees a day, until — "

"— until we 're frozen stiff," solemnly added Frank.

Louis nodded his head, and the others

said nothing. They strained their eyes toward the disappearing schooner, which was now fast sailing out on the sea and making a long tack down the coast.

"She won't come around for an hour," Louis ventured to predict.

"Then it will be dark, and it won't do us any good."

Harold turned his eyes from the sail to the cliff opposite the one on which they were standing, and then said excitedly:

"There are the wreckers! They've caught sight of the sail too, and they're trying to attract her attention."

The four boys instinctively withdrew to the shadow of the trees. The four men were standing around their improvised beacon tower, looking toward the ocean. They had undoubtedly been as much excited by the appearance of the ship as the boys, and they were utterly oblivious to everything around them.

"They're wondering how they can catch their prey," Louis muttered. "I believe a storm is coming up, and if this ship was caught off here, it would be at-

tracted by the false beacon light of these men. They 're figuring on that, mark my word!"

The wind, which had been blowing hard all day, had filled the sky with scurrying clouds, and as the sun set there were many indications of a storm. The ship in the distance had noticed this, and while the boys watched, her sails were shortened, and preparations made for struggling through a heavy wind.

When the boys last saw her, she was still headed seaward, sailing rapidly along under short sails. Then darkness swept her from view, and the boys turned away, with bitter disappointment, to their task in hand. They gathered up their day's spoils and returned to their boat. Inside of their cave home they built a roaring fire, and tried to calm their perturbed spirits by feasting on the good things they had captured in woods and water.

CHAPTER XXIV

BUT the night was not one calculated to soothe the spirits of restless mortals. The storm was in the air, and, even in their cave home, the boys breathed it, and felt it. There was an intoxicating elixir in the air, which made them restless and moody. When the first roar of the wind came, its queer noise, echoing in the great caverns, startled them; but becoming accustomed to this in time, they paced their narrow ledge of rocks until they could stand it no longer. Louis finally said:

"I 'm going up on the cliff again to see if that ship is in sight. The rest of you need n't go if you are afraid of getting wet."

"I was going to propose the same thing an hour ago," Frank replied. "I can't stand it down here to-night. The air seems oppressive. I must see what 's happening up there."

"I 'm going too," Warren added. "I 'm as restless as any of you."

"Well, you can count me in," was Harold's answer. "I 'm no camp steward to stay behind in this dark place such a night as this."

This unanimous decision of action brought about some quick work. Within five minutes after Louis's remark, the four boys were in their boat, ready to pull out from their underground home. It was dark, intensely dark, in the cavern, and outside it was not much better. There was no star or moon shining, and the clouds completely enveloped the earth and sky. They paddled the boat along by following the side of the rocky wall, and they were not conscious of leaving the mouth of the cave until a dash of rain was flung into their faces. Then, with coats buttoned up to chin, they pulled along until they reached a favorable landing-place at the foot of the cliff.

"Nobody will come around hunting for our boat on such a night as this," Louis said, as he tied the rope to a tree.

They left the craft moored safely near an overhanging boulder, and stole silently through the darkness toward the top of the cliff. The wind and rain beat wildly around them, dashing in their faces, and making progress slow and painful. It was a night such as the bleak Labrador coast alone could witness, and the boys more than once felt awed and terrified under it. All around them, the woods and rocks of the bleak cliffs echoed and trembled with the deafening crashes of thunder, while each zigzag course of the electric fluid revealed a landscape bathed in a deluge of rain.

There was no animal life stirring. All living creatures had sought shelter, in terror, escaping from the storm in hidden crevices and caves where the fury of the elements could not reach them. The boys were the only living specks on the great scene, and they toiled so slowly and nervously forward that at times they seemed only a part of the rocks and woods around.

Every foot they climbed upward, the fiercer grew the wind and rain. Exposed

finally to the unobstructed sweep of the storm on the summit, they clung to each other for fear they might be carried over the precipice.

"I don't like this," gasped Harold, clinging to a tree. "I think our cave home is better on a night like this."

"I 'm changing my mind, too," Warren replied.

"But we must see the ocean first," Louis answered, starting once more forward. "We 're nearly to the edge of the cliff where we were early in the evening. Over here — "

"Look! There 's a light!" exclaimed Frank.

All eyes were directed toward the sea. Through the curtain of darkness, they could see the occasional flash of a light. It was faint and glimmering in the far distance, but it was unmistakable. It was the light from a ship approaching the shore.

"She 's turning back," Louis said, "and I 'll bet she 's trying to find a safe harbor. This storm is too heavy for her!"

"There 's the beacon light down there! See, it is flashing out!"

"I understand it now. The ship has caught sight of the light, and she is heading shoreward to find out what it means. Listen! Was that thunder?"

"It sounded like a gun!"

"It was, and from the ship. I saw a flash at the same time."

Louis tightened his hold on his support, and, with bent head, waited and listened. The report of the gun was heard again. The distress signal boomed over the waters as clearly as the echo of the thunder from the clouds. For some time the boys remained silent. The howling of the storm, and the sight of the flashing lights, were indications of an approaching tragedy that made them tremble with excitement. Every time the gun boomed forth above the roar of the storm, they started and tightened their hold on each other.

"We must stop it!" muttered Louis, hoarsely, after a long pause. "We must help them!"

"How? What can we do?" gasped Frank.

"That light on the cliff across the water is deceiving them. It is leading them on the rocky point. We must demolish it before it is too late. Their only hope is to run out to sea again, and try to ride the storm. It 's death and destruction here!"

"Then we must cross the river, and fight the men?"

"We must destroy that light. We have no time to lose. It is nearly too late now. Come!"

There was no questioning this command, for it was virtually an order which not one of the boys could disobey. Visions of the *Northern Star* being lured upon a rock-bound coast by a false light were floating before the eyes of Louis, and this lent him strength and desire to reach the obnoxious beacon light of the wreckers before the ill-fated ship should be lost.

Down through the woods he plunged, followed closely by the others. They

stumbled over wet logs and trees, and slipped in the darkness on smooth stones and boulders; but these mishaps had no power to cool the ardor of their spirits. In places it was so dark that they had to stop in bewilderment until the next flash of lightning should reveal the way to them. Finally they reached the edge of the stream and found their boat where they had moored it.

"Hurry! Hurry!" urged Louis, as the boys stumbled into their places. "We must pull hard for the other shore."

"But is n't it rough in mid-stream?" asked one of them. "The storm has made the waves bigger than I ever saw them on a river."

"Yes, but we can't stop for that. We must cross at once, and then get on the lee side of the opposite bank."

They pulled a strong oar, and sent the boat flying through the water, cutting through the darkness like a knife; but soon they encountered white-capped waves which the wind had whipped into angry foam. The boat bobbed and thrashed

around in the waves, and for a time, between the rain and wind, it was doubtful if they could proceed.

"Pull away!" shouted Louis. "A few more strokes, and we'll get under this bluff."

True to his word, he steered the craft directly across the narrow stream, and then close to the opposite side, where an embankment protected them from the fury of wind and waves. It was comparatively easy rowing within the shadow of the bank, and the water was calm enough to permit rowing without constantly having the oars dipped by long rolling swells.

There was no apparent abatement in the storm when they reached a sheltered anchorage on the opposite bank, and the dismal booming of the guns from the ship in distress could be heard at long intervals. The sound of the guns indicated that the ship was rapidly approaching the coast, and that its captain was being deceived by the false light into the belief that there was a safe anchorage and harbor inside of the point. It was all such a

picture of terror and horror that the boys had scarcely any words to say, as they toiled away to reach the scene of the beacon with but one purpose in mind.

They were not so familiar with this side of the bank, and they stumbled about in the bushes and rocks with more disastrous results to their clothes and limbs than on their side of the river. However, the rays of light ahead guided them, and they toiled upward, unmindful of the impediments in the way. Not until they had reached the summit of the cliff did they realize that they were undertaking a mission that required more pluck and nerve than merely climbing a steep hill in the dark stormy night. The beacon would undoubtedly be guarded by the four men. They would have to be outwitted or boldly repulsed.

When they came in close view of the false light, Louis stopped. Turning toward his companions, he said:

"We must rush the light! That must be destroyed and knocked down at all hazards. Then we can look out for ourselves, or, if necessary, fight the men. But

if we attack them first, they might be able to repulse us. So remember the light is the first thing to attack. If we can destroy that before the ship goes on the rocks, we can save her."

Once more, when they halted within a few yards of the strange light, Louis said: "We must climb up the tree to get at the light. There 's a rude ladder leading up to it. The man turning the barrel with the light in it must be up there on the platform. If he 's alone, I can handle him; but if — "

"I 'll go up with you, Louis," Frank answered. "Let Warren and Harold watch below, and help us if they can; but we must make sure of the light."

"You 're right, Frank. Two are better than one up there. We 'll destroy the ladder behind us, so no one can follow after."

"But how about getting down again, if you burn your bridges behind you?" asked Warren.

"We 'll jump, and trust to luck that we land all right. It 's only ten feet from the

lowest limb. When we jump, you and Harold be ready to help us if the men are around."

"All right! We'll make a flank attack on them with clubs," Warren replied.

Louis stooped and fumbled around in the soil at his feet. When he rose again he handed several stones as big as his fist to Frank.

"Put these in your pocket," he said. "They may help us out of a bad hole. If besieged from below, a few rocks dropped down on their heads might rout the enemy quicker than anything."

"I've already provided myself with a few," Frank answered. "I'll give a good account of myself. Now are you ready?"

"Yes! But don't make a break for the ladder until we are discovered. A little caution now is worth more than a good deal of boldness later. If we can reach the ladder without being discovered, we shall have a better chance of taking the fort with a rush."

While Warren and Harold hid in the

bushes at a safe distance from the beacon light, Frank and Louis slowly worked their way noiselessly toward the tree on whose sawed off top the rude wooden platform and revolving barrel, with the light inside, were built. The roar of the wind and storm was such that their approach could not have been heard had they tramped boldly along. Caution, however, made them vigilant, and each step was carefully considered.

When they passed beyond the circle of light cast by the beacon, they stepped more quickly, and soon reached the side of the huge tree-trunk. It was a mammoth spruce-tree that had withstood the storms and winds of the bleak coast for upward of half a century. The rude ladder was fastened against the trunk, leading up to the first branches. The two boys climbed this carefully, and soon found themselves among the branches of the tree, directly under the queer light. Pieces of wood were nailed on the side of the tree to make easy climbing the rest of the way, and Louis carefully searched these

out with his hands and mounted, step by step, toward their goal.

But when close to the platform above, he stopped, and laid a restraining hand on Frank's shoulder. Above them, in the light cast by the revolving lamp, were the four wreckers, seated on a wooden railing. One of them was engaged in turning a crank, which the boys knew must cause the barrel to revolve. The light inside of the barrel was burning fitfully in the breeze, fed by one of the men occasionally with oil and blubber.

They were very quiet, with eyes turned toward the ocean, where the lights from the doomed ship were approaching closer every minute to the fatal rocks. They were so intent upon watching their prey that they thought little of any danger near them.

For a few moments Louis and Frank remained perfectly quiet in the tree, debating within their minds what course to adopt. They had not prepared for such an emergency as confronted them. Here were all four men, ready to resent

their interference. Moreover, they had the advantage of being securely seated on the platform, while the boys would have to climb up to it to get even a foothold.

CHAPTER XXV

THE indecision of the two boys in the tree was prolonged for some time. They were too close to the men to whisper instructions to each other, and any communication they desired had to be carried on by signs. The men above were as quiet as the boys. They were intently watching their prey approaching the rocks, and they had no thought of any danger near them. Once or twice the leader of the wreckers grunted some muffled words of instruction to his companions, but neither Frank nor Louis could understand them.

Meanwhile, the booming of the ship's gun of distress was growing alarmingly near and frequent. Louis looked through the branches toward the sea, and his heart misgave him. It seemed that the ship must be so close to the outer point of

rocks that their effort to rescue it was too late. He gave a slight groan under his breath, and the men above stirred uneasily at the sound, as if fearing some danger from out of the blackness of the night. Their guilty consciences made them more fearful of an unknown, uncertain danger than of something tangible which they could see and feel.

Suddenly Louis touched Frank on the arm, and proceeded to climb, beckoning him to follow. There was a large branch of the tree, which towered on one side above the queer beacon light, that the men had not cut down. Louis slowly worked his way along toward this branch, and then climbed up until he was above the platform on which the men were crouching. From his vantage-point he could study the revolving barrel with its light burning inside, and, at the same time, shield himself with the foliage.

When Frank climbed up behind Louis, the limb groaned and creaked under their combined weight. The storm of wind and rain was bending and swaying the

limb back and forth so that the two boys had difficulty in holding to it. With the heavy weight of Frank and Louis added to its burden, the limb threatened every minute to break.

The queer actions of the giant limb attracted the attention of the men. They looked up at its leafy head, and then out into the blackness of the storm. They had not caught sight of the boys, and they attributed the violent actions of the big limb to the wind. This had increased somewhat, and the men had difficulty in keeping their beacon light going. They fed it frequently with seal fat and some liquid which had the odor of oil. In a few moments they grew accustomed to the swaying of the limb over their heads, and they once more turned their attention to the ship in distress.

In climbing this limb, Louis had no definite plan of action in mind. He saw that, by getting above the men, he would have a better opportunity to study out a plan of action. He could drop down upon them, or pelt them with stones

from above; but, whether this was the best thing to do, he was not yet satisfied.

When he saw how violently the wind swayed the big branch, the thought entered his mind that a good way to demolish the false beacon light, and rout the men, would be to have the limb break and crash down upon the barrel and platform. Every gust of wind threatened to do this, but for some reason it failed quite to do the necessary work. They remained in this position for some time, and then Louis slowly began to work his way down again. As he passed Frank, he made a sign for him to remain.

Nothing but the noise of the storm ever saved him from betraying his presence to the wreckers. Even the cracking of a thick twig was thought by them to be the result of the wind rushing through the foliage of the trees. Slowly but surely Louis descended until he was on the ground again. Then, hurrying to the place where Warren and Harold were hiding, he explained matters.

"You must follow me," he added, "and

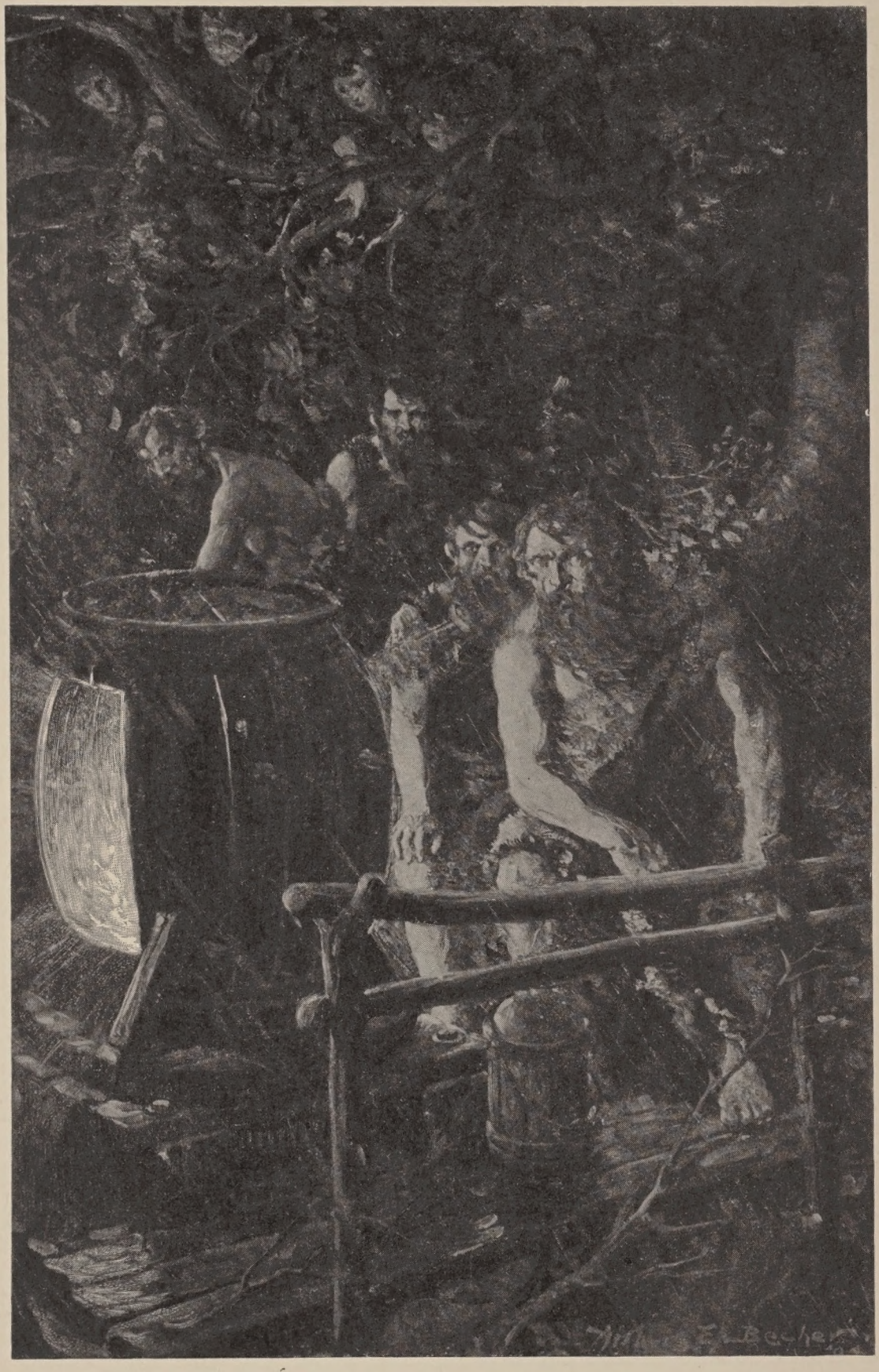
when the limb breaks be ready to save yourself. It can't stand the combined weight of all four of us, and it will fall directly across the platform."

Warren and Harold had watched the ascent of Louis and Frank, and they had been wondering what kept them from making an attack on the light. When Louis told them that they were needed above, they quickly sprang from their positions in the bushes and prepared to follow him. There was more excitement, if more danger, in joining with Frank and Louis in the attack, and they were ready for any emergency.

All three boys climbed the tree carefully. Louis led the way, and gave the warning when to rest and keep perfectly quiet. When the wind blew with special violence through the tree, cracking and snapping the branches and twigs, they climbed upward quickly to take advantage of the noise and commotion. In this way they passed the line of light which shone directly upon the wreckers squatted on their rude platform.

When they reached the place where Frank was clinging to the big limb, Louis once more took the lead, passing Frank, and climbing far out on the limb. The wood groaned under the combined weight of the four boys, and they had to wait until the wind subsided somewhat. During a momentary lull in the storm, they worked their way far out on the limb, until they hung almost directly over the beacon. There they rested and waited. The limb had all the weight it could carry. A dozen pounds more would break it. The boys clung to it, eagerly and expectantly. Another heavy gust of wind would probably throw them to the ground, or at least to the platform beneath. Their work would be accomplished in breaking the limb. Then they were to save themselves as best they could by clutching at any available object.

They had before now broken off the tops of trees by throwing their weight upon them to fall to the ground, and this boyish pleasure prepared them for a greater emergency than had ever before confronted



them. The darkness around made the feat more difficult, and they looked with a little fear at the shadowy branches, which seemed to flit around in an uncertain way.

The lull in the storm lasted for half a minute. Then a blast of wind struck the tree, and swayed the branch up and down. Following this came others in quick succession, until the limb was swaying back and forth like a ship's mast in a storm. It whipped and thrashed around, some of the smaller limbs actually touching the barrel.

Then a stronger gale than usual struck it. There was a groan, followed by a sharp snap and a crash which seemed to obliterate the very noise of the storm. The big limb, as large around as one's body, had broken off close to the trunk, and with the combined weight of the four boys and the heavy pressure of the wind, it went crashing downward like an avalanche of earth. It struck the barrel and flung it to the earth in a dozen pieces, scattering the burning wood and oil in all directions. When it reached the platform, built in the fork of the old tree, it smashed it to pieces,

and carried the frightened wreckers down with it. There was a complete demolition of the whole outfit of the wreckers.

But the boys had no time to stop and look at the result of their work. They knew that their lives were in danger, and that they would have to save themselves in some way. Being prepared for the accident, they stood ready to take advantage of every opportunity. Frank caught a swaying limb from another tree in his descent, and landed safely on the ground by climbing down it. Warren struck the platform heavily, and, when it crumbled to pieces under his feet, he clutched at the trunk of the tree, and managed to break his fall, so that he was not hurt. Harold was stunned by coming in contact with one of the pieces of flying wood, but, after landing in a bed of wet moss and leaves, he recovered himself in a few moments, and started to find his companions.

Louis was farther out on the limb than any of the others, and he reached the ground first; but in passing the platform his heels came in violent contact with the

head of one of the wreckers. The blow stunned the man, and tumbled him head-first off the platform. This helped to break the fall of Louis, and, finding that he could make a jump for the tree-trunk, he released his hold and landed among the lower branches of the tree. When he cautiously descended to the ground he could hear the groans of some one near him.

Turning to ascertain who it was, he was confronted by one of the wreckers, who rose from the grass almost in front of him. Louis turned his back on him, so that he could not see his face. The man grunted and called a name. Louis grumbled back an inaudible reply, and quickly disappeared in the darkness. When he reached the tree where the boys had decided to rally as soon as possible after the accident, Louis found Frank already there.

"Hurt much, Frank?" he asked eagerly.

"No, only a few scratches. Are you?"

"Sound as a dollar. How about the others?"

"Here comes Warren now. He can report himself."

Warren stole in from the open space around the tree, and beyond a few minor injuries he reported all right. It was some time before Harold appeared. He could not recover from the blow on his head for some time, and he staggered toward the tree uncertainly.

"What is it, Harold? Anything serious? Any bones broken?"

"No," he said slowly. "I think I 'm all right except my head. I struck that in my fall, and it feels queer yet."

"Almost as bad as if you had been bucking the centre line of Amherst's team," replied Frank. "Well, that does n't kill, but it does hurt one's feelings for a time, and takes the game out of one."

"Humph!" snorted Harold. "Amherst's centre is nothing to that tree I struck. You don't know anything about it!"

"Did n't I have a brush with the same tree?" Frank asked.

But there was no opportunity for reply. The fire made by the fallen barrel and oil had suddenly been extinguished by the rain, and the intense darkness of the

scene suddenly recalled the boys to a sense of their danger. There was a noise in the bushes near by which indicated the presence of the wreckers. Out of the darkness of the storm there came a growl, and a voice said:

"I tell you I saw them! One of them tumbled past me with the tree, and his foot hit me on the head. Ain't I got his hoof-prints there now?"

"How could they be up the tree?" asked another voice, sceptically.

"I ain't explainin' nothin'," shortly answered the first. "But I seen 'em, an' they must be roun' here somewhere. Likely 's not they got killed in the fall, an' we 'll find their bodies in the bushes."

"Then kick around, an' if you find 'em holler to me."

Louis gave a silent signal to hide in the bushes, and the four boys crouched in as small a space as possible. In a few moments they could hear the heavy tread of the searchers, and occasionally there was a loud crash from a club with which they beat the bushes after their prey.

Nearer and nearer the men approached, beating around in a circle which rapidly narrowed toward the hiding boys. It seemed as if their presence would be discovered, when the man, within a few yards of them, stopped, and swore loudly.

"That blanked ship's turnin' around an' goin' out to sea again. Can't we make a bonfire, and get her back?"

"No, she's taken the alarm, an' we'll have to let her go."

"Then we'll hunt up these rascals, an' fix 'em. They did it!"

There was a savage intonation in the voice of the man which added terror to the anxiety of the boys. They knew that the wreckers, disappointed in their game, would not stop short of murder to get revenge. The men were almost convinced by this time that the boys had, in some way, helped to destroy their primitive beacon light. It would certainly go hard with them if they fell into their hands.

And to fall into their hands they seemed doomed, for with a renewal of the search,

the men beat the bushes vindictively and with more care.

At this juncture Louis felt that their only hope lay in retreating. If not able to cope with the men in a battle, they certainly had a fair show of outrunning them, although even in this form of athletics he was not so sure of their superiority. The way the men had chased them down the beach, and swum out through the breakers after their boat, made him realize that they were no poor runners and swimmers. Yet something had to be done. In another minute they would be routed from their hiding-place and surrounded. Louis turned toward Frank, and whispered the order:

"We must make a break for the boat. Keep close together, and if anybody attacks us spring upon him together. Don't separate. Now come!"

Directly in front of him one of the men was searching in the bushes, and on all other sides they appeared equally evident. Louis decided to rush between them. He sprang up, and darted along swiftly but

cautiously. But he had not taken a dozen steps before he butted head-first into a dark form which seemed to loom directly up from the grass in front of him.

The two came together with such force that both recoiled a few feet, and fell heavily to the ground. The man who had thus been unceremoniously butted growled angrily:

"What are you doing, Jim? You tryin' to take me for a stone wall?"

Louis recovered himself instantly, and turning swiftly to one side hurried past the fallen man; but as he darted along, followed by his three companions, the wrecker yelled loudly:

"Here they are! The little —"

The rest of the sentence was not finished, for the man sprang to his feet and made a hasty rush after the boys. In a few moments the other wreckers were in hot pursuit, and the race through the darkness became one of intense interest.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE darkness of the storm was in favor of the boys, for the form of a man could not be seen a dozen feet away. The crashing and blinding fury of the wind and rain also made it difficult for the pursuers to track their prey. The noise of breaking twigs and rolling stones dislodged by the boys could not be heard above the storm, and the men found little encouragement in trying to follow them by the sounds of their footsteps. From the very first, the boys disappeared entirely from the sight of the wrecker who had discovered them, and he naturally trusted to luck that they would keep in a straight line.

But Louis and Frank were born strategists. They knew the value of dodging and of running around in a circle. In a few moments they had turned sharply to the left, and then, having almost made

a complete circle, they withdrew entirely from the path of their pursuers.

"We 're safe for the present," the former gasped; "but we 're a long distance from our boat."

"They 'll naturally look for us along the water front," Frank replied, listening to the faint echoes of the shouting men.

"Yes, and if they happen to strike the river near our boat, I 'm afraid we 're lost."

"They are just as likely to do it as not."

"Yes, but our safest way is to reach the boat, while they are shouting and betraying their position. Later, they will grow more wary, and lay in wait for us."

"All right. We 'd certainly feel better to get back to our cavern. They would n't think of following us there."

Louis once more led the line of march, striking directly for the river front, which they reached after much difficulty and a few mishaps. By that time the wreckers had either passed beyond their range of hearing, or they had suddenly changed their tactics.

"I don't like this so well," Louis said

nervously. "If we follow the edge of the river, they 'll surely spring upon us. They know we must have our boat anchored somewhere. It is n't safe to go along here."

"Then what can we do?"

"Take to the water. The tide is running up the river, and it would not be such a difficult matter to swim from here to the boat. I don't think it 's more than a few hundred feet farther up the bank."

There was a grim, silent shaking of heads. This proposition did not meet with approval. The boys looked at the dark water, and grew more reluctant to plunge in it.

"Oh, well, for that matter, I 'll swim it alone, and come back for you!" was the somewhat irritable reply of Louis.

To the chorus of dissents to such a proposition, Louis added: "I 'm not sure but it 's the best and only way for us to escape. I 'm a good swimmer, and would n't mind the swim; but you — well, I 'll undertake it alone."

"No, no! We won't have it!"

But their leader was firm, and, after some discussion, he persuaded them to remain where they were until he returned. Stripping himself of coat and shoes, Louis stepped into the water, and swam silently along the shore. As he disappeared in the darkness, the boys suffered greater anxiety than at any time during their adventure. The storm howled and beat about them, but they had nothing to do except wait and hope for the best.

It seemed like a foolhardy feat at first thought, and Louis was no more than well away from the shore than he began to regret his bargain. After all, it would have been better to have stayed on land and walked along the edge of the river. The water was cold and benumbing, and the rain beat mercilessly upon his head and face, almost blinding him at times. It was difficult to distinguish objects on the shore, and twice he was deceived by logs, which had the outlines of his boat. Disappointed both times, he was proceeding along less hopefully, when suddenly he heard a noise near the shore. Almost

instantly he caught sight of dark figures in the bushes.

At first the swimmer thought that he had been discovered, and he was turning to move away, when a voice startled him.

"That 's the boat out by the point there," the man said.

Louis was immediately aroused, and, standing as high out of the water as he could, he looked around. A dozen yards away he could see the boat, and not far from it the four wreckers making their way toward it through the bushes. With swift and noiseless stroke, Louis swam toward the boat. He reached it ahead of the men, and, still undiscovered, loosened the rope. Then, swimming on his back, and pulling the boat by the painter, he made it apparently drift out into the current. The men quickly exclaimed:

"She 's adrift! There she goes up stream!"

Then, to head her off, they ran along the banks, to plunge into the water at a point a dozen yards away. But the boat, instead of going with the tide, continued to drift,

strangely, out toward mid-stream, until Louis thought that he was safe from observation. Then, climbing over the sides, he quickly turned the bow about, and rowed against the tide. In the gloom, in the opposite direction, the men continued to look for the floating craft, while Louis was rowing it back to where he had left his companions.

They were probably as glad to see him back as he was to get there; but it was not until they had crossed the river to the opposite bank that he related his experience. Five minutes of delay would have lost the boat to them forever, and, in the end, they would have undoubtedly fallen into the hands of the enemy.

It was long past midnight when they finally reached their cavern home, and, thoroughly exhausted with their night's adventures, turned in to rest. Before they threw themselves down on their bed of spruce and pine boughs, Frank said:

"After all, it was worth it. We saved the ship."

"Yes, indeed, it was worth it, ten times over," was the solemn answer from Louis.

"If we had n't saved the ship, a dozen lives might have been lost. Then, too, we saw the wreckers actually at work, luring the ship on the rocks. We have evidence against them which would convict them in any court."

"But what good is the evidence without court, judge, jury, or policemen to arrest them?"

"No good now, but some day it may be. I don't think they 'll be left here undisturbed long after my father hears about them."

"But we 're not out of the woods yet, and we can't do much toward bringing these men to justice."

"No, indeed. On the contrary, we 're in more danger than ever. The men will make a determined effort now to find us. They 'll scour the woods and rocks around for us to-morrow, and we must be on the lookout all the time."

"I propose we stay in the cave then for a few days," Warren said. "We have firewood and provisions enough to last half a week, if we 're careful."

"I second that proposition," Harold added; "for I'm anxious to explore this cave, and this will give us just the opportunity we need."

"I don't think there'll be much to explore," replied Frank, doubtfully. "What do you say, Louis?"

"It's probably just the same all the way through, except that the tide runs swiftly back and forth, and, where there is so much current, there must be some sort of a lake or bay."

"You don't think it runs under the hills and comes out to the surface again on the other side of the range of mountains?"

"I don't know; it may. We'll explore it anyway to-morrow."

With this decision reached, they rolled over on their beds of leaves, and were soon dreaming peacefully of better and happier days. It was late in the morning before they finally opened their eyes and took their cleansing plunge in the water around them.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE cavern, through which the arm of the river had cut its way, had been carved out during many centuries of slow work, and its high walls indicated the erosive effect of ice. In the winter time, the tide had brought tons of ice in from the sea, and piled it mountain-high, leaving it there in great masses, to melt under the warmer actions of the summer winds. The walls of the cave were scarred and cut in places by the action of the ice and water until they almost resembled the work of human hands. Great pieces of jagged rock hung suspended in mid-air, ready to be dislodged by the slightest jar; while cakes of ice and remnants of old icebergs were caught between the crevices of the rocks. There were all the relics of great titanic battles waged between the elements. During the season of storms, when the arm of the sea was a great float-

ing lake of ice cakes and floes, the grinding and crunching of the ice inside of the cave must have boomed and echoed like the reports of muffled cannonade. To the boys, the sights were inspiring, if not actually terrifying at times.

As they pushed their boat along, the darkness of the cave increased, until they were rowing through a curtain of blackness from which no objects glimmered. Even the walls of the cavern faded from view, and the water which murmured around their boat was invisible. For a long time they drifted slowly in with the tide, no one venturing to break the silence.

When Frank finally drew a long sigh, the others started as though some one had shouted. "I don't like this," Frank said, shuddering. "It 's too spooky for me!"

"Suppose we should get caught in here, and could n't find our way back again?" suggested Warren, resting on his oars.

"We could n't get lost," answered Louis, with an attempt to inspire the others with a little confidence. "The tide runs in and out twice a day. All we would have to

do to return, if we got lost, would be to turn our boat adrift. The current would do the rest."

"Not if we got caught on some rock, or were wrecked."

"No, we might lose our lives anywhere, if we got wrecked," was the answer from the bow of the boat.

"But I prefer to lose mine in broad daylight, where I can see the sun and landscape," Harold interposed, moving uneasily in the stern.

"So would I," promptly added Warren.

Louis suddenly laughed, and said: "You're a brave set of explorers! Why, this is n't anything but an ordinary cave, — a pretty big one, but nothing to get frightened at. You're as safe here as back in our camping-place!"

"We had some light there," grumbled Frank, persistently.

"Oh, yes, and so we will ahead, when we get far enough."

"Do you think so? In that case I'm ready to go on."

"Well, don't pull us into the wall, or

you will wreck us," sharply cautioned Louis, as the three suddenly took courage at their leader's prediction, and sent the boat forward with such a spurt that it was fended with difficulty from the rocky walls of the cavern.

"Now move cautiously, and let the tide carry us. In half an hour the tide changes, and then we can drift back on the current."

To this order they readily obeyed, and for ten minutes they slowly allowed their boat to move, ghost-like, through the curtain of intense darkness, with the echoes of the cavern sounding strangely, like the snapping of distant electric sparks, but with no flashes of illumination accompanying them. Every ripple of the water was magnified in the echo, and the breathing of the four occupants of the boat sometimes alarmed them. Their voyage appeared to promise little in the way of change or surprise. There was no way to tell whether the roof of the cavern was lowering, or the sides approaching each other ahead; but by the sounding echoes they judged that they were entering a channel which, in

time, would grow too small for their boat.

They were impressed by the idea that their underground river found its source somewhere deep in the bowels of the earth, and that farther exploration of it would give them little pleasure. Even Louis, who was always eager to go to the very roots of a matter, and make an exploration thorough and complete, felt his patience deserting him, and he glanced ahead anxiously and restlessly.

"Come, Louis, we 've had enough," ventured Frank, in another remonstrance. "You 've played Columbus long enough, and your crew is about ready to make you a prisoner, if you don't turn around. We 're getting afraid of this terrible darkness. I feel "—

"Then, if I 'm to be treated like Columbus, let me ask for five minutes longer. Then I 'll — "

When he stopped and peered forward, he added, in a changed voice: "There 's light ahead! See it?"

"Come now, that was one of Columbus's

tricks. Don't be too literal in playing the part of the admiral!"

"I'm serious, Frank. There's light ahead!"

"Land ahead?" mockingly replied Frank. "And floating plants and seaweed. Cheer up, sailors! We'll reach the new continent yet!"

"I do see light," Warren interrupted. "Look around, Frank."

When all four gazed over the bow of the boat, they were conscious, in time, of seeing dimly a slight lifting of the shadows around. It was so uncertain and obscure, however, that it took them some time to be convinced of its reality. They closed and opened their eyes. The light — dim, gray, and misty — was still there.

"It is certainly getting lighter," Frank acknowledged. "But where does it come from?"

"I don't know; we'll soon find out."

There was no farther need to urge them forward. They plied their oars, and swiftly pushed their craft along. The light increased slowly, filling the cave so that in a

short time they could see the sides of the rocks, but not the roof. An occasional sparkle and glimmer of the water around them showed that they were certainly sailing toward a brighter and lighter place.

"Another Columbus has come to his own," Frank remarked finally. "All credit is due to you, Louis. Now can't you find land and some New-World Indians?"

Louis paid no attention to this chaffing. His sharp eyes had been peering straight ahead, riveted upon some strange outlines of rocks, trees, or misty vapor rising from the water. For some time he could make nothing of it. He thought of peculiar atmospheric phenomena which often deceived the eyes of the best seaman. He closed them twice, and then renewed his observations. Still the lines, which seemed to take form and shape, were there. Turning to the others in the boat, he asked:

"Do you see anything ahead? — anything that looks like — well, I don't know what — but like shadowy outlines of — "

"Yes, I see peculiar lines," Warren answered hastily. "They seem like — like — "

"What?" asked Louis, quickly. "What do they seem like?"

"Why—why—like the lines of a—ship."

"That's what I thought, but I did n't dare trust my eyes."

Frank and Harold jumped from their seats. Then all four looked through the misty light. For some moments they were silent. Their eyes were gazing upon a queer picture. As the boat drifted along, the outlines of a ghostly ship appeared. If an optical illusion, it was perfect. There were the masts and rigging, the furled sails and spars, the dark hull and sharp prow, all except some parts which had been broken by a storm. It was a wrecked ship, rising slowly out of the dim light, — a ship that was coated with ice, and almost white in its shape and form.

"This is wonderful!" Frank exclaimed. "Is it an illusion, or a reality?"

Instinctively the boys crowded closer together. There was something so ghost-like and uncanny in the sight that they looked to each other for courage. They had dared almost any danger with brave

and fearless hearts; but the sight of this unparalleled vision in the dark cavern unnerved them.

"Suppose we go back, Louis," Harold whispered, thoroughly alarmed at the sight. "I think it's time we reached daylight once more. I'm beginning to see visions."

"No, no, it's no vision," hastily responded Louis. "That is a ship, a real ship!"

"What, here in this cave! How can that be?"

"I don't know how it can be, but it's a ship!"

This confident assertion brought mental relief to the frightened boys, and they pulled once more at their oars. The tide had nearly ceased to flow by this time, and it was almost on the ebb. Left to itself, the boat remained almost stationary on the water. They had reached a place by this time that was flooded with more light than any part of the cave. A few more strokes of the oars carried them into a more commanding position, where the

queer outlines of the ship appeared less dusky and unreal.

"Yes, it is a ship, a wrecked ship," Louis added a little later, with even more confidence in his voice.

"But how could it have been carried in here?" persisted Frank.

"By the tide, I suppose."

This explanation seemed satisfactory. But the nearer they approached the ship, the queerer it appeared. It was only when they were within a few yards of it that the mystery of the ghostly reflection of spars and rigging was explained. The ship was veritably enclosed in a sheath of ice. The hull itself was resting in a huge cake of ice, and the spars and masts were coated with it.

"It looks as if she had been frozen up in an iceberg!" exclaimed Harold, as he watched the strange appearance of the craft.

Louis started visibly at this remark, and replied: "Pull around to the stern, and see if we can read her name!"

Warren, standing by his side, asked:

"You don't think now, Louis, that — that it 's the *Nancy Brown?*"

"I don't know," huskily replied Louis. "But all ships would look alike down here. Row around, and we 'll see."

But when they reached the stern of the ship, they found a ton of ice hanging over the stern, so that any attempt to read the name was soon abandoned. They pulled the boat up alongside of the wrecked ship, until they could touch her side.

"She 's a wooden ship like the *Nancy*," Louis said, "and she looks like her. But I don't say that it is she."

"Would n't it be great if it was?" Frank said. "Our voyage would be worth while, after all."

"We 'll soon find out."

Leading the way up the side of the ship, Louis soon stood on the ice-coated deck. There all was confusion and wreckage. The ship had met with rough handling, and on all sides were evidences of hasty abandonment and violent struggling with the elements. The ice had fallen

over on the decks, and had frozen in irregular masses around.

Part of the deck was cleared away, as if the crew had sought to extricate the ship from the ice, and Louis was able to slip and slide along until he reached the door of the cabin. All was cold, icy, and slimy to the touch. The door refused to move on its hinges. The iron work was rusty and eaten away by corrosion. With some difficulty they battered down the door, and once inside, a foul odor of musty, dead meat and vegetables greeted their nostrils. But when the outside air had been allowed to circulate around a little, the boys were able to endure the odor.

Louis was the first to cross the cabin threshold. He strode straight to the desk where the log-book should be kept. It was not there. Then he turned to the captain's private locker. It was fastened down, and the rusty lock was more difficult to break than the hinges of the door. At his feet, however, he discovered a half-expanded life-preserver. He picked it up eagerly and turned it over. The name

on the other side had not been obliterated. With a sudden exclamation of delight, he dropped the life-preserver.

"It's the *Nancy Brown!*" he shouted. "Read the name! It's father's long-lost ship!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE announcement of their discovery sent a thrill of pleasure and exhilaration through the boys, and with one accord they let out a yell of delight which echoed so thunderously through the rocky cavern that they were at once startled and frightened by the noise.

"Never mind!" exclaimed Frank. "We can stand one good shout! I don't care if the wreckers do discover us."

"Yes, we do," Louis answered earnestly. "They don't know of the *Nancy's* presence here, and we don't want them to find her."

"How could she have crawled in here without their discovering her?"

"Easy enough! She's come in with the tide at night-time, or she was caught here before those fellows landed on this coast."

"But if the tide brought her in, why does n't it take her out again?" persisted Frank.

"That 's also easy to explain. She 's wedged in here on the rocks. I 'm going to find out, anyway."

Louis was at home on board of one of his father's ships, and the *Nancy Brown* had been his favorite. He knew every corner of the vessel, and almost every rope and spar. He quickly hunted through the cabin and sailors' quarters, finding everything just as the men had left them before their hasty abandonment of the schooner. Below decks, the cargo of sealskins, whale oil, and dried fish were a little musty, but not spoiled. The ship had spent two years in the grip of an iceberg, and during all that time she had been frozen stiff, with nearly everything aboard preserved from decay by the ice. She was a veritable storage warehouse with her goods held in cold storage for indefinite use. After a hasty inventory, Louis announced:

"Nearly everything is safe and sound.

We 've practically saved everything, the cargo as well as the ship. There 's nothing very perishable aboard, and what has decayed we can throw overboard, and then clean ship."

"That means then we 've saved thousands of dollars to your father," Frank said slowly and seriously.

"Yes, tens of thousands," was Louis's hearty reply. "If we can once float her, and get her out of the grasp of these wreckers, and then find a ship to pick us up, we shall be in luck. And we must do it!"

"Yes, if it is possible. But are you sure we can float her?"

"That is what I 'm going to find out about now. I 'm going to sound the water down here, and even dive down."

The *Nancy* was resting easily on a rock, with her bow forced upon it so that she could not budge, although each tide swung her stern around, and threatened to dislodge her. Louis, after a long examination of the water underneath, made this out to his satisfaction. He dove down

under the dark water, and felt around under the keel of the boat.

"Her bow is about five feet on the rock," he explained; "but the hull itself is not damaged. The rock is a smooth one, and there have been no waves to wrench the *Nancy* around. She 's as strong and intact as ever, except for her rigging."

"Then we can't get her off the rock without steam power or a tug?" queried Harold.

"Yes, we can lighten her bow by carrying the cargo toward the stern. I think, then, a good flood tide will carry her off."

"What! We can then actually sail on her out of this cave?"

"I hope so, and believe so," solemnly answered Louis. "But it means many days of hard work. We must first find axes and chop away this ice. It 's clung to her on all sides, and we shall find plenty of hard work in clearing her. Then we must patch up the rigging and spars. That will take less time, for we can sail without everything first class.

Then we must shift the cargo toward the stern, to lighten the bow. We must live and sleep on her for a week or two, working and eating here, until we 're ready to sail."

"But who will get food for us? Man cannot live without eating, Louis," responded Frank.

"True, but he can live on a cargo of dried and salted fish, hard-tack, stale bread, pork, and — why, Frank, we have grub enough aboard to last us six months. All we 'll have to do is to thaw it out. The ice-box is stocked full. All we need is water, and we know where to get that. Come, now, I 'm anxious to begin at once."

So were the others. The prospect of saving the *Nancy*, and floating her on the sea once more, to escape from the wreckers, inspired them to great effort. With their axes, which they found in the cabin, they proceeded to chop away the ice, undermining it so that it would fall in great masses into the water. The ice was old and brittle. Some of it had drifted

into the cavern with the *Nancy*, and it had never had an opportunity to melt. This was easily cut away.

Before night the boys had freed the bow of the ship of the ice, and, when the tide went out and flowed in again, Louis exclaimed:

"Why, I believe the ice alone will lighten her nearly enough to float her! Here, we 'll have to throw an anchor overboard, or we 'll be drifting back to the sea before we 're ready to go."

When the tide reached its flood, the *Nancy* did shift and swing around restlessly; but she was not quite free from her strange mooring. Louis made another examination, and reported that the bow was resting very lightly on the rock, barely sufficient to hold her.

"Six inches more of water would float her free," he added. "What we need now, is to shift the cargo a little, and we shall be ready to start."

With two anchors thrown over the stern, the *Nancy* was securely held from any sudden lurch from her position, and the

boys spent their night in her cabin, sleeping, for the first time in many days, on beds of luxury. There was no fear of discovery in their subterranean home, and they slept peacefully and soundly.

They were up bright and early the following morning. Louis had prepared for them a breakfast of dried fish, salt pork, hard-tack, and some fresh game they had left from the preceding day's hunt. This was washed down with some strong coffee which they found in the ship, and then they were ready for another hard day's work.

There was no shirking their work that day. Every one labored like a beaver. The hope of freeing the *Nancy* from her berth as soon as possible urged them on. The ice fell, with heavy and continuous splashes, into the sea. Below the water line most of the ice had been melted by the warmer current of salt water from the sea, but above that the ice clung in heavy masses to the ship. It took two good days of work to finish the ice. By that time the *Nancy* stood a foot higher in the water.

Louis was more than satisfied with his work.

"It won't take us half a day to lighten her bow now so she will float," he said confidently. "We 'll fix up the sails and riggings first, and leave the shifting of the cargo to the last."

This was not so easy a matter as cutting away the ice, for none of the boys save Louis understood the art of splicing rigging and mending sails. Their first attempts were bungling and unsatisfactory. By degrees, however, they learned the work under the careful directions of their leader.

"We 'll qualify as good sailors yet," Frank remarked, on the third day, after they had finished a specially arduous task of splicing a broken line. "Then we 'll demand full wages from Louis, or mutiny or go on strike."

"No, we 'll maroon him on some island, and run away with the *Nancy Brown*," interposed Warren.

"We 'll run up the Jolly Roger, and play Captain Kidd," Harold added. "I 've

always longed to play pirate in dead earnest."

"Some day you'll get enough of playing it in earnest," Louis made answer, "for these wreckers on the beach are no better than out-and-out pirates."

"You think they would resort to murder, then?"

"To take this ship from us, they'd do every one of us, rather than let us escape with it."

"Then how are we to get away?" asked Warren, his face paling a trifle.

"We're to steal away under the cover of darkness, and then, if discovered, we're to put up a stiff fight. Father always carried firearms. I'm going to make a hunt for them now."

The four descended to the cabin to explore its contents. They had been so busy in clearing their ship that they had no more than cursorily examined the cabin. In overhauling the different articles stowed away in lockers and racks on the sides of the small room, Louis was soon delighted to find a brace of navy pistols. These

were loaded, and ready for an emergency. The locks were so rusty, however, that it was necessary to take them apart and clean them. The cartridges appeared to be intact, for one of them exploded when the hammer was brought down on it.

"Now we're ready for the wreckers!" Frank exclaimed, flourishing one of the weapons over his head. "I'm good for two of them, and Louis should be able to clip the other two."

"Oh, we're not going into the killing business," Louis answered with a grim smile. "These are to be used only as a last emergency, and then only to wound. I'm not in the mood to kill anybody."

"No, we know how tender-hearted you are, Louis," Frank replied. "But why do you blacken my character with such insinuations? You'd think I was an out-and-out murderer of the fiercest type!"

"Oh, no, we wouldn't, Frank," Warren said cheerfully. "You haven't the nerve for that. We can see that by the way you handle that pistol."

"We should have a little target practice," Frank added, without noticing this remark. "I 'd like to try my skill against some of you."

"What! and bring the wreckers here to capture the *Nancy* when we 're off guard?"

"They could n't hear the noise way back here in the cave!"

"I don't know," Louis responded, with a shake of the head. "I 'm of the opinion we 're nearer the surface than you think. This light back of us comes from an opening on the opposite side. We might be within a few hundred feet of it."

"Then why not go ahead and explore it?"

"No," protested Warren. "We 've had enough of the cave and this whole coast. I want to get away now. Let 's put all of our time in clearing the boat."

"I 'm of the same mind, Warren. We 've found all we need in this cave. Now let us get away. How long will it take us to get ready, Louis?"

Harold looked up questioningly, and

waited for the reply with no little eagerness.

"If we work hard, I think in two days we should be able to go. The tide will suit our purpose night after next. It should turn to run out about nine o'clock. There is no moon then until nearly three in the morning. That will give us six hours to pass out of the cave, and down the river to the ocean."

"Shall we start for the ocean in the dark?" asked Harold.

"Yes; but when we clear the rocks near the entrance, I shall anchor, and wait until morning. We can fix our sails out there, and try how she sails. We will be two or three miles from shore, and if the wreckers attempt to reach us, we will have ample time to sail away. In the afternoon we can sail down the coast until there is no danger of the wreckers following us."

"But what shall we do if a storm comes up?"

"That's our only danger. We may be wrecked on the coast. But we must take that chance. We must hope that no

storm will strike us until we can meet another ship. However, an ordinary storm will not hurt us. I think we can manage to run before it with bare poles, and hold our own."

"Well, that is better than staying here. I 'm tired of this inhospitable coast."

"So am I!" they all answered in chorus.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE next two days were busy ones for the boys. Having set a time for their departure from the cave, they strained every nerve and muscle to be ready for the final experiment. To their delight, Louis's prediction proved true concerning the shifting of the cargo to lighten the bow of the boat. The *Nancy's* nose suddenly swung free on the flood tide of the second day, and, when the current started to carry her down stream, the boys had to secure her with ropes and anchors. Louis let the tide swing her bow around so that she pointed seaward, and in this position she was anchored for the eventful moment.

Throughout all that last day they worked with feverish and nervous haste. Everything about the decks and rigging was put in fine shape, and there seemed nothing else for the boys to do. They ate their early supper, and then waited for the tide

to change. The flood was later than expected, and time passed never so slowly. Finally, when the *Nancy* began to tug at her chains, the boys were eager to weigh anchor.

"No, not yet," Louis cautioned. "We want the tide to run with full force before we start. It will be a difficult thing to keep her in the middle of the stream at the best. I must steer by guess rather than by sight. Besides, we need a drag to keep her bow ahead. If she ever drifts sideways in this narrow place, she'll go on the rocks for good. If she got wedged in one of the narrow places here, it would be all up with the *Nancy*."

"How are you going to keep her straight?" Frank asked.

"I have a drag ready for her."

The boys made a sort of rude raft of old pieces of timber, found in the hold and on deck. This was attached to a rope over the stern. Then Louis sunk a small rock in the water, tied by a rope to one end of the raft. The rock dragged in the water, but did not quite reach bottom.

"That will keep us from drifting as fast as the tide," Louis explained; "but it will also keep us from drifting sideways. Now with that and the rudder, I shall be able to steer all right, if the current runs straight. If it makes any sharp turn, I'll probably run the bow on the rocks."

It was an anxious moment when finally Louis, taking command of the ship, gave orders to hoist anchor. Each boy had his special duties to perform, and he was to respond promptly to the order of their captain. They had learned the necessity of obedience, and not one was prepared to disobey orders even for an instant. It was a disciplined crew which stood ready to navigate the *Nancy Brown* out of her strange harbor to the sea.

"All ready now!" shouted Louis. "Weigh anchor! Make haste!"

Simultaneously the boys labored at the windlass, and the two anchors were at length pulled from the rocky bottom. Almost instantly the tide caught the *Nancy* and carried her forward. Then she stopped and jerked. She brought up suddenly with

a shiver; but it was only the tightening of the rope connecting her with the drag behind. Then, with the stern pulled toward the drag, the bow kept pointing straight down stream. All was darkness around, and no mariner could penetrate the gloom to steer the ship through the cave. Louis made no pretence of steering. The current would have to clear them of the rocks, or they would run aground again. Once outside of the cave, he could cast aside his drag, and steer for the open sea.

Slowly, but surely, they floated along through the great underground cavern. The rippling of the water was the only sound that greeted their ears. Every minute they expected to hear a grating noise under their boat, or a crash which would splinter their bow to pieces.

But it did not come, and they were ready to congratulate themselves on their success, when suddenly there was a sharp creak and a crash which made them jump in terror. Every one turned white with fear and disappointment. Pieces of wood and ropes were flung down at their

feet, narrowly missing their heads. Louis, after a moment's pause, said :

" Never mind ! It was only the topmast that hit the roof of the cavern. We 're not badly injured yet."

This announcement brought a sense of relief to them, and they once more watched and waited. It seemed an hour before a cool breath of fresh air blew upon their brows. Then, looking around, they saw the shadow of trees and mountains. Looking overhead, they saw millions of stars shining.

" Why, we 're out of the cavern ! " exclaimed Warren, in wonder.

" Of course we are," Louis answered. " We 're heading straight for the sea on the river. You can now say good-bye to your old camping-place."

" Well, it was n't such a bad place, after all."

" No, I shall always remember it. Some day I 'd like to return and see it again. That old cave has a fascination for me."

The others laughed, more from an excess of joy than from a sense of appreciation of Harold's words. They were at last

free from their prison, and were floating on a ship destined to some civilized port. Louis had little difficulty in steering the ship out beyond the line of rocks to where the low swells of the ocean made the *Nancy* bob up and down with graceful motion. The moon rose when they were finally ready to cast anchor, and, by means of its light, the boys could study their situation to better advantage.

"We must divide our forces into four watches," Louis said. "I 'll take the first watch, and then turn in to let Frank try it."

"What danger is there out here?" asked Frank.

"Danger from storms, wind, and the wreckers," was the answer. "Besides, a ship always has a watch. It never sleeps, and we may as well begin right."

Thoroughly tired with their work and lack of sleep, the other three were soon wrapped in deep slumber. Louis watched the shore carefully, dreading lest the wreckers may have caught sight of the *Nancy*, and were preparing to creep upon it in the darkness.

But morning dawned with no sign of the wreckers. The others were aroused from their slumber, and the crew, after eating their breakfast, proceeded to remedy the damage done to the topmast. This had been broken off near the end, and most of the morning was spent in clearing away the wreckage.

Up to this time they had seen no signs of life on shore, but suddenly, on the outcoming tide, they were startled to see a long raft of logs floating. It was propelled by four men, and with long sweeps they managed to make good time. They were a mile from the shore before any one discovered their presence.

"Here come the wreckers!" shouted Harold, in alarm.

The others stopped in their work. After the first surprise, Frank said: "Yes, but they can never catch us. Our sails will carry us beyond their reach."

"But we have no wind, Frank," replied Louis, with a choking voice.

The men had chosen the moment of attack well. There was a dead calm, and

the men on the home-made raft were drawing rapidly upon them. Louis saw their progress with dismay. Finally, when they were within half a mile of the schooner, he said:

"Frank, get the pistols. It is fight or give in; we can't escape. We must not let them board us; if they do, we 're lost."

Frank brought up the loaded pistols. Louis took one, and said:

"Don't shoot until I give the word. I shall warn them off first. If they find we have firearms, they may withdraw until dark. Then a breeze may spring up. Oh, for a good wind!"

The wreckers rowed swiftly toward them until within hailing distance. Then Louis, pistol in hand, leaned over the railing, and shouted: "Halt there! If you come closer, I 'll shoot."

He waved the big navy pistol over his head, but the men apparently took it for a bluff. They continued to row toward the schooner. Louis raised his pistol, and took deliberate aim at the water, just ahead of the approaching raft. There

was a sharp report, and the bullet splashed in the water so close to the raft that one of the wreckers caught the spray from it. This brought them to a sudden pause. It was not a bluff on the part of the boys, and the men were undecided what to do. They withdrew some distance, and held a long consultation. They were apparently trying to formulate some other method of attack.

"I don't think they 'll attempt to board us until dark," Louis said. "Then, if we don't get any wind, we 're in a trap."

The morning was one of unusual calm. No wind sprang up to encourage the boys. Instead, the few gentle zephyrs appeared to die out completely. By noon the sun was hot and bright, and the surface of the sea was like a pool of melted glass. The tide changed, and rushed up the coast again, and surged past the *Nancy* into the river. In order to keep her from floating back to her former berth, the boys had to throw two anchors over. The men on the raft had to do the same, and thus the afternoon watch began.

Early in the afternoon a breeze seemed to spring up at sea, and the water was dark and rippling beyond a certain line of vision; but before it reached the *Nancy*, it died down to light puffs. It was an ocean breeze, blowing directly toward the shore, which, with the in-flowing tide, tugged hard to shove the *Nancy* on the rocky coast. If the wind had veered around, and blown from the shore, the boys would have had a chance to escape.

"But we can't beat against this tide with such a puffy, light wind," Louis explained. "We would go on the rocks in half an hour. But when the tide changes again, an off-shore breeze may spring up."

All the afternoon there was apparently no change. The wind blew in fitful puffs from the ocean, dying out as it reached the coast. The *Nancy* tugged away at her chains, and the four men on the raft watched and waited for their prey.

Uneasily the boys watched the sun, sinking in the west. Everything seemed to work against them. To lose all at this

last moment was a crushing thought. With escape so close at hand, it was doubly cruel to miss it.

But they were not prepared to yield without a fight. Both Frank and Louis were determined to shoot dead the first man who should step on the vessel's deck. They held their pistols in hand all day, scarcely willing to lay them down long enough to eat and drink.

It was late in the afternoon when the men on the raft began to show some uneasiness, as if preparing to make another attack. For some time the boys watched them closely, waiting for the first movement on their part. Presently Louis exclaimed: "Look! That explains their actions! There 's a sail, and they 've caught sight of it."

The boys looked in the opposite quarter, and immediately gave a shout of delight. There was a large vessel bearing down upon them. The wind outside was strong enough to bring the schooner along at a good pace, and within half an hour she stood close to the shore. When

she reached the zone of light winds, she stopped, and a boat was lowered.

"They 're sending a boat out to help us!" shouted Frank.

"Yes, but why don't the wreckers run? They 'll get caught!"

"They have some game up their sleeve," suggested Louis.

As if to verify this prediction, the men picked up their oars and rowed their raft out to meet the approaching boat. They kept beyond pistol-range of the *Nancy*, making a wide circle to avoid her.

"They 're going to tell some wild yarn about us," Louis said; "and then they will board the *Nancy* with the sailors from this schooner."

The queer raft with the wreckers on it, and the long boat from the schooner, met a mile away from the *Nancy*, and the two crews appeared to be in consultation for some time. Finally the men from the raft were taken aboard of the long boat, and this was rowed rapidly toward the *Nancy*.

"They 've won over the sympathy of

the sailors," Louis said, with an annoyed expression on his face. "If the sailors believe their lies, we may be imprisoned."

"What can they say about us?"

"Oh, tell them we stole their boat from them, or mutinied and put them ashore and left them."

The approaching boat came within hailing distance, and the man in the stern rose from his seat and shouted:

"Ahoy there! We wish to come aboard!"

"All right!" shouted Louis. "You or any of your sailors are welcome, but none of those fellows you picked up can land on this craft."

"What schooner is that, any way?"

Louis was about to reply, when he suddenly flung up his hands, and said: "Hurrah, it's the *Northern Star!* What a fool I was not to recognize her! Look, Frank! Look! And that is Mate Ned!"

Then, leaning far over the side, he shouted:

"Hello, Ned! Hello, Mate Ned! Don't you know me? I'm Louis Pendleton —

Captain Pendleton's son. How 's father? Is he well?"

Mate Ned stood in the stern of his craft, and gasped. He could not frame words to answer, and Louis continued gleefully:

"We 've got the *Nancy Brown!* We 're on her now, and we 're taking her home!"

Then suddenly, as one of the wreckers rose from his seat in the boat, he shouted: "Look out for those men! Don't let them escape! They 're wreckers! Crack them over the head if they try to jump overboard!"

The wreckers, upon finding that their game was up, tried to escape by jumping into the sea; but the sailors from the *Northern Star* were too quick for them. A short struggle followed in the long boat. The wreckers fought hard for their liberty, but they were soon overpowered.

The conflict in the boat was noticed from the deck of the *Northern Star*, and a second boat was quickly launched. This came dancing over the sea at a lively rate, and it reached the *Nancy's* side almost as soon as the first boat. In the stern of the

second one was Captain Pendleton. Louis, upon seeing him, shouted:

"Here we are, father, all safe! And I've brought back the *Nancy!* She's all right!"

Mate Ned climbed to the deck of the *Nancy*, and grasped the hands of the boys, giving them a hearty welcome, and asking a dozen questions about their adventures. A few moments later, Captain Pendleton climbed up from his boat, and he and Louis were locked into each other's arms.

"I never expected to see you again," the captain said in a trembling voice. "We had given you up for lost. It seems miraculous!"

"You'll think so after we've told you our story," Louis answered.

"And the *Nancy Brown!* Where did you pick her up?"

"Oh, that's a part of the story," responded Louis. "You must wait until we get to that."

"Yes, yes, I can wait now for anything," Captain Pendleton replied, with a look of happiness on his face.

CHAPTER XXX

WHEN the four wreckers were transferred to the deck of the *Nancy*, securely handcuffed and bound with ropes, Louis and his companions related the story of their troubles with them, and wound up by describing the false beacon light on the promontory. The wreckers had little to say, and after Captain Pendleton and some of his sailors had visited the scene of the wrecked light, it was decided to carry the men away to some port to turn them over to the British authorities. Besides the rude lighthouse which the boys had wrecked, the men had a comfortably stored place in a cave where they lived. This was found stocked with sufficient incriminating evidences of their guilty trade. There were articles taken from several sealing vessels which had been lost in the northern seas. After recovering everything of value in the cave,

Captain Pendleton set sail for the harbor of Nain.

It required only a few days' work on the part of the sailors from the *Northern Star* to rig up the *Nancy Brown* so that she could sail south with her sister ship. The two were nearly of the same size and capacity, and as they finally weighed anchor and started on their journey, no prouder captain ever paced a deck than their owner. Captain Pendleton took charge of the *Northern Star*, and Louis, with Mate Ned as an adviser, sailed the *Nancy*. By dividing the crew of the two schooners, each one had enough men to handle the ship in ordinary weather. They hurried south as rapidly as weather conditions would permit. They touched at Nain just long enough to turn the wreckers over to the civil authorities, and then, with all sails set, they renewed their long trip.

A month later, they sailed into the harbor of Boston to unload a part of their cargo. Here the boys were given an opportunity to return to their separate

homes; but so strongly attached had they become to the ship they had found in the Labrador cave that they wished to leave her only at the end of her cruise. It was several days later when they sailed into New Bedford harbor. Great was the interest and astonishment among the inhabitants when the *Nancy Brown*, accompanied by the *Northern Star*, came into harbor. She was considerably the worse for rough usage, and lack of paint and new rigging; but otherwise she appeared equally trim and stanch as her sister ship.

Captain Pendleton was not slow in spreading abroad the story of the miraculous recovery of the *Nancy*. Full credit was given to the boys, and they enjoyed a temporary popularity among the inhabitants of New Bedford that nearly demoralized them. They were requested repeatedly, on all sides, to relate more particularly their experiences in the great Labrador cave, and in time the repetition grew a trifle monotonous.

"I 'm tired of being a hero," Frank

finally declared. "It 's a bigger nuisance than I thought."

"But this is nothing to what it will be next winter, when you get back to Sheffield," Louis responded. "Then every boy will demand the particulars every night."

"In that case, I propose we make Frank spokesman for the crowd," Warren suggested. "We 'll turn every inquirer over to him."

"Yes, he 's the best story-teller of the crowd, and he should have a chance to cultivate his gifts," Harold added.

Frank tried to look disgusted; but he knew that there would be others anxious to help him relate their strange adventures in the great Arctic sea and ice caverns. Their trip and miraculous rescue was, after all, a mutual affair, and they would enjoy talking and discussing the different points of it for months and years to come.

Before they returned to school, there was handed to each of them a check for a substantial sum, from Captain Pendleton,

which, in rather archaic sea terms, it was explained to them, represented salvage money for rescuing the *Nancy Brown* from her cavern.

"We can't accept it, Louis," they protested in one voice.

"But you must," Louis responded. "Father would feel hurt if you didn't. We each have a fourth interest in it."

"Then we must put the money together and go off on another vacation trip next year," Warren suggested.

"Agreed! We'll throw our fortunes in again next summer," was the prompt response from all.

And as they returned to their studies, they dreamed of the past, and looked forward with healthy-minded anticipation to the future, building, it may be, air castles that were never to be realized. But there was joy in it and no harm.

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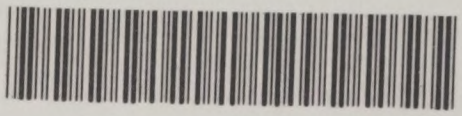

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